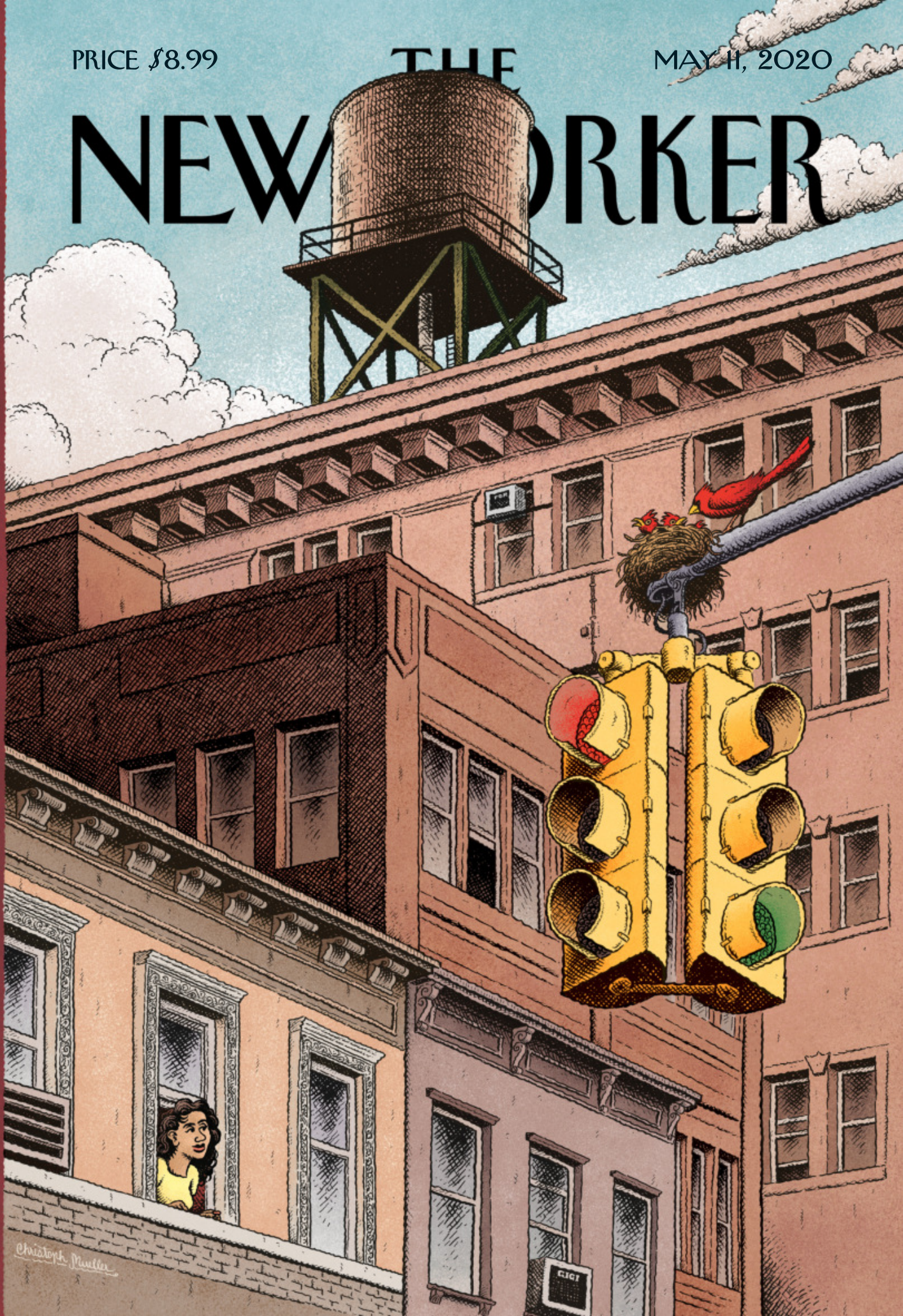
PRICE $8.99

THE NEW YORKER

MAY 11, 2020



VISIT…

DO YOU LIKE SAVING MONEY?

Get GEICO.

GEICO®

geico.com | 1-800-947-AUTO (2886) | Local Agent

Some discounts, coverages, payment plans and features are not available in all states, in all GEICO companies, or in all situations. Boat and PWC coverages are underwritten by GEICO Marine Insurance Company. Motorcycle and ATV coverages are underwritten by GEICO Indemnity Company. Homeowners, renters and condo coverages are written through non-affiliated insurance companies and are secured through the GEICO Insurance Agency. GEICO is a registered service mark of Government Employees Insurance Company, Washington, D.C. 20076; a Berkshire Hathaway Inc. subsidiary. GEICO Gecko image © 1999-2019. © 2019 GEICO

THE NEW YORKER

MAY 11, 2020

QQ group:970508760

4 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

11 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Amy Davidson Sorkin on reopening chaos; renters strike back; in the stay-at-home haze; teens supporting teens; a toast to a distinguished career.

ANNALS OF MEDICINE
David Quammen 16 The Warnings
Lessons from another coronavirus outbreak.

SHOUTS & MURMURS
Ethan Kuperberg 23 Quarantine Stew

PERSONAL HISTORY
Lauren Collins 24 Missed Calls
Losing a father during the pandemic.

AMERICAN CHRONICLES
Evan Osnos 28 The Greenwich Rebellion
How one town's élite formed an alliance with Trump.

LETTER FROM EUROPE
Anthony Lane 40 Because the Night
The pleasures of an overnight train.

SKETCHBOOK
Barry Blitt 45 "Contemporary Life Hacks"

FICTION
Katherine Dunn 48 "The Resident Poet"

THE CRITICS
A CRITIC AT LARGE
Jill Lepore 57 *The unlikely success of "Sesame Street."*

BOOKS
61 Briefly Noted
Adam Kirsch 64 *Søren Kierkegaard's purity of the heart.*

THE CURRENT CINEMA
Anthony Lane 68 *Film considers a future of streaming.*

THE THEATRE
Vinson Cunningham 70 *The evolving art of Lorraine Hansberry.*

POEMS
Ed Roberson 34 "Sand"
Eavan Boland 43 "The Fire Gilder"

COVER
Christoph Mueller "Shelter in Place"

DRAWINGS *George Booth, Elisabeth McNair, Zachary Kanin, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Victoria Roberts, Roz Chast, Harry Bliss, Barbara Smaller, Will McPhail, P. C. Vey, Carolita Johnson, Glen Baxter, Emily Flake, Colin Tom, Ellis Rosen* SPOTS *(for Pam McCarthy) João Fazenda*

Mother's Day order by 5/6!
Your Children's Names
Sterling Silver with Swarovski® Branded Crystals set in gold from $390
JOHN-CHRISTIAN.COM
888-646-6466

Introducing the Nautilus

An homage to mid-century Danish lounge chairs.
Learn more at Chiltons.com/SMC.
CHILTON
chiltons.com 866-883-3366
CHILTON FURNITURE CO.

Experience a retirement community that's bringing generations together—engaging at every age and stage.
KENDAL at Oberlin
1.800.548.9469
kao.kendal.org/intergenerational

STRUGGLING WITH BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER?
OUR PROVEN CARE CAN HELP
844.551.6655
mclean.org/bpd

CONTRIBUTORS

Evan Osnos (*"The Greenwich Rebellion," p. 28*) writes about politics and foreign affairs for the magazine. His book on China, "Age of Ambition," won the National Book Award in 2014.

Amy Davidson Sorkin (*Comment, p. 11*), a staff writer, is a regular contributor to Comment. She also writes a column for newyorker.com.

Anthony Lane (*"Because the Night," p. 40; The Current Cinema, p. 68*), a film critic for the magazine since 1993, is the author of the collection "Nobody's Perfect."

Katherine Dunn (*Fiction, p. 48*), who died in 2016, is the author of "Attic," "Truck," and "Geek Love." Her novel "Toad" will be published next year.

Ed Roberson (*Poem, p. 34*) is the author of ten books of poetry. His new collection, "Asked What Has Changed," is forthcoming in 2021.

Adam Kirsch (*Books, p. 64*) is a poet, a critic, and the author of, most recently, "Who Wants to Be a Jewish Writer?"

Lauren Collins (*"Missed Calls," p. 24*) has been a staff writer since 2008. She is the author of "When in French."

David Quammen (*"The Warnings," p. 16*) is the author of many books, including "The Song of the Dodo," "Spillover," and, most recently, "The Tangled Tree."

Eavan Boland (*Poem, p. 43*), who died in April, began contributing to *The New Yorker* in 1987. Her poetry collection "The Historians" comes out this fall.

Barry Blitt (*Sketchbook, p. 45*) is a cartoonist and an illustrator. His latest book, "Blitt," is a collection of his illustrations for publications including *The New Yorker*, the *Times*, and *Vanity Fair*.

Antonia Hitchens (*The Talk of the Town, p. 13*), a former member of the magazine's editorial staff, has also written for the *Times*, among other publications.

Christoph Mueller (*Cover*) is an artist and the author of the graphic novel "The Mighty Millborough." This is his first cover for the magazine.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

VIDEO DEPT.
Workers at a distribution center in the Bronx discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the city's food-supply chain.

ANNALS OF INQUIRY
The science-fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson imagines how the world will feel after the pandemic.

Download the New Yorker Today app for the latest news, commentary, criticism, and humor, plus this week's magazine and all issues back to 2008.

LEFT: SAM RUSSELL; RIGHT: ANTOINE D'AGATA / MAGNUM

THE MAIL

WHO IS MITCH MCCONNELL?

It is a testament to Jane Mayer's peerless journalism that, in her article about Mitch McConnell, Mayer tries, again and again, to find someone who actually likes him ("Enabler-in-Chief," April 20th). She searches for evidence that he possesses any warmth, compassion, integrity, or fairness. The fact that not one of his three daughters has anything to say about him, in the twilight of his life and in a piece revealing his true legacy, speaks volumes about the man. In Mayer's withering profile, we come to see that McConnell wears a hard, closed shell, and that there is nothing inside.

Tom Seigel
Weston, Conn.

PANDEMIC PROFITEERS

Before picking up Nick Paumgarten's article about the financial crisis caused by COVID-19, I was a mild-mannered mother of two, scanning the clearance section of JCrew.com ("The Price of a Pandemic," April 20th). Now I want blood! Compared with these finance guys, the robber barons of the past look like Johnny Appleseed. By Paumgarten's account, many of today's investors have revelled in profiteering off the pandemic. Paumgarten writes that "the basis of the financial markets, and of arguments about them, is numbers—data and their deployments." But the basis of today's financial markets seems to be unchecked avarice devoid of oversight. One thing is certain: we need more women in leadership roles in industry. The toxic masculinity Paumgarten describes is economically and politically devastating.

Clare Fader
Winston-Salem, N.C.

TIGER, TIGER

My mother's love for trashy reality TV always baffled me, until she convinced me to watch "Tiger King" (On Television, April 13th). As Doreen St. Félix describes, viewers under quarantine have been glued to the show, which is undoubtedly crass and culturally insensitive. St. Félix poses an explanation for the attraction: "Tiger King" offers "an outlet for the id now that the ego is under siege." For me, the series satisfies a different kind of craving. It is a slow and shocking train wreck, and as we sit inside, with our reality collapsing around us, it is comforting to watch another reality destroy itself even more fully. "Tiger King," very simply, helps us feel better about our own lives, offering a twisted sense of satisfaction for these dark times.

Lily Cratsley
Leominster, Mass.

LA FRANCE PROFONDE

When I read Bill Buford's article about a boulangerie in Lyon, and the small-batch flour that Bob, its baker, used in his excellent bread, I was reminded of the five years that my wife and I spent in the area ("Good Bread," April 13th). The provincial portions of France that still vibrate with local traditions and values are referred to as *la France profonde*, or Deep France, and the Auvergne region is probably its best example. Auvergne's largest city, Clermont-Ferrand, is the birthplace of Michelin, which produces both tires and the famous bible of gastronomy. I worked for the company, and we lived in an apartment in central Clermont-Ferrand, opposite a cathedral made from volcanic rock, which is also the mystical source of the soil that enriched Bob's baguettes. I would stop at a boulangerie each morning to collect a *pain au chocolat*, still warm from the oven. I don't know whether that bread was made from the same flour as Bob's, but Buford's piece brought back the frisson of joy I experienced every day as I walked to work, smiling at how good simple food can taste.

Michael Fanning
Mt. Pleasant, S.C.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

Our Members return each year as faithfully as the tides.

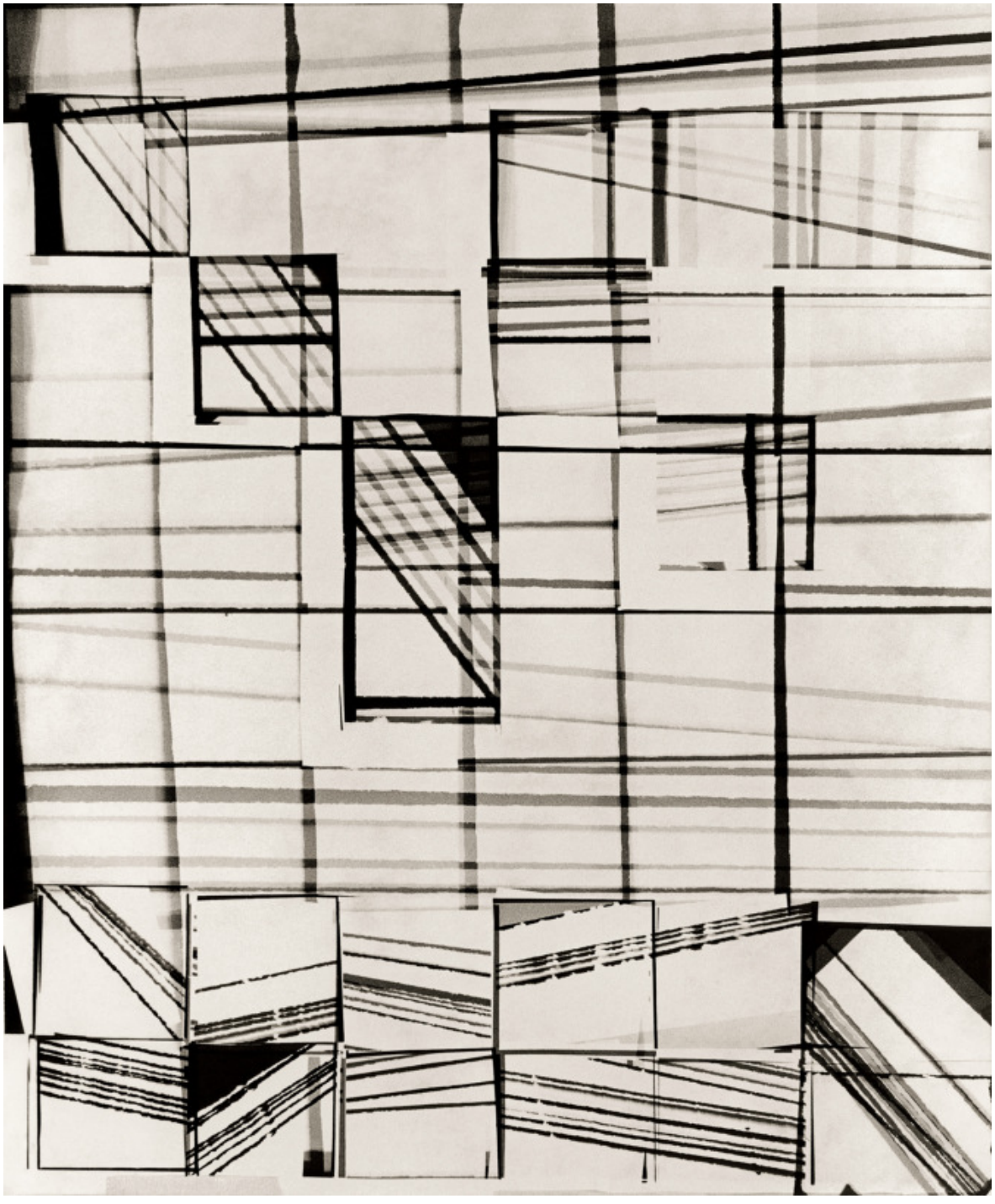
Situated on 2,500 acres of unspoiled paradise, Ocean Reef provides a long list of unsurpassed amenities to its Members including a 175-slip marina, two 18-hole golf courses, tennis facilities, state-of-the-art medical center, K-8 school, private airport and more.

There are only two ways to experience Ocean Reef Club's Unique Way of Life – as a guest of a Member or through the pages of *Living* magazine. Visit **OceanReefClubLiving.com** or call 305.367.5921 to request your complimentary copy.

OCEAN REEF CLUB®
A UNIQUE WAY OF LIFE
KEY LARGO, FLORIDA

In an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus, New York City museums, galleries, theatres, music venues, and cinemas have closed. Here's a selection of culture to be found online and streaming.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



Accessing **Frieze New York** usually requires a trip to Randall's Island. This year, May 8-15, the contemporary-art fair is a mouse click or an app download away. (Visit frieze.com for specifics.) Among the offerings from some two hundred international galleries is the elegant 1969 photogram "Precincts" (above), by the septuagenarian Indian artist Nalini Malani. It was selected by the discerning Laura Hoptman, the director of New York's Drawing Center, for a special section about trailblazers of the twentieth century.

DANCE

New York City Ballet

City Ballet was one of the first American ballet companies to stream works from its archive during this crisis. Every Tuesday and Friday through May 29, it will broadcast ballets on its Web site at 8 P.M. (The streams remain online for three days.) On May 5, it's "Rubies," a jazzy Art Deco piece by the company's founding choreographer, George Balanchine, set to Stravinsky's "Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra." Three days later, it presents "Concerto DSCH," led by the powerhouse ballerina Sara Mearns. Made by the Russian-born choreographer Alexei Ratmansky in 2008, the piece combines the sporty optimism of Soviet poster art—heroic lifts, sunburst formations—with wit, crisp musicality, and a touch of sadness. Its title reflects the score, by Shostakovich, who had a habit of embedding in his compositions a musical motif based on his name—"D" for Dmitri; "SCH" for Shostakovich, the letters correlating to the German pronunciation of the notes E flat, C, and B.—*Marina Harss (nycballet.com)*

The Bolshoi Ballet

With "Don Quixote," a mainstay of the Bolshoi, the company can show off its huge roster of dancers, its panache, and the high-flying technique for which it is known. It's not a serious ballet, and it bears almost no resemblance to its literary namesake. The Don is a peripheral figure, an affably befuddled knight who ambles through from time to time, mostly reacting to the events around him. The central characters are Kitri (Ekaterina Krysanova), a fiery tavern owner's daughter, and her dashing (but penurious) admirer, Basilio (Semyon Chudin). Their dances are all swishing skirts and bravura, propelled by Ludwig Minkus's energetic, Iberian-influenced score. There are gypsy dances, fandangos, and cape-flipping numbers for toreadors, too. The Bolshoi will broadcast the ballet on its YouTube channel on May 7.—*M.H. (youtube.com/user/bolshoi)*

"Paramodernities Live"

Last year, at New York Live Arts, Netta Yerushalmy presented all six parts of her high-aspiring, big-question-asking project "Paramodernities." Each segment was a kind of deconstructed lecture-demonstration in which a scholar, joined by dancers, took on a canonical choreographer—Nijinsky, Graham, Ailey, Cunningham, Balanchine, and Fosse—along with an absurd range of hot-button issues. More wry than dry, these talk-and-dance hybrids were engaging and thought-provoking, even when unconvincing in argument or tone. This week, on her Web site, Yerushalmy is live-streaming the whole buffet in digestible portions: one part per afternoon, followed by a question-and-answer live chat featuring such distinguished guests as Jeremy O. Harris, Fred Moten, and Tracy K. Smith.—*Brian Seibert (May 4-9. nettay.com)*

"Virtual Works & Process"

With the performing-arts series "Works & Process" on hold, the Guggenheim Museum has been commissioning past participants to create short videos, each lasting no longer than five minutes, while abiding by social-distancing guidelines. Every Sunday and Monday, a new entry is added to the series' YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram channels. The prodigious beatboxer Chris Celiz started things out with an improvisation, which the dancer Anthony Rodriguez then used as a soundtrack for his own dexterous freestyling. Other artists are sheltering together, so the series isn't all solos. In a video dropping on May 10, the voguers Karma Styles and Omari Wiles jam together, inside and on rooftops. For his contribution, streaming on May 11, the veteran choreographer Gus Solomons, Jr., focusses in on the muscles of his face.—*B.S. (guggenheim.org/event/event_series/works-process)*

TELEVISION

Mrs. America

This nervy, nine-episode FX miniseries, created by Dahvi Waller ("Mad Men"), is an intensely psychological portrait of Phyllis Schlafly, the godmother of the modern anti-feminist movement, played with frightening, actressy charisma by Cate Blanchett. Ambitious costuming and wig direction help us identify the popular saints of second-wave feminism: Gloria Steinem (Rose Byrne), with her long hair middle-parted and her aviator glasses; Shirley Chisholm (Uzo Aduba), with her black-salon bouffant; a behatted Bella Abzug (Margo Martindale); Betty Friedan (Tracey Ullman), her big hair streaked, skunklike, with gray. The story, which captures the radical élite's reflexive dismissal of the allure of white conservatism, begins with the Senate passing the E.R.A., sending it to the states for ratification, and with Chisholm, the country's first black congresswoman, running for President. Chisholm, in reality a staunch, ingenious politician, is depicted as an egoless exemplar of political duty, but Ullman's portrayal of the middle-aged Friedan, the intellectual founder of the movement, feels, in contrast, painfully real.—*Doreen St. Félix (Reviewed in our issue of 4/27/20.)*

MUSIC

John Adams: "Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?"

CONTEMPORARY CLASSICAL The composer John Adams has long shown a flair for catchy titles. "Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?," a piano concerto commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, takes its name from a saying

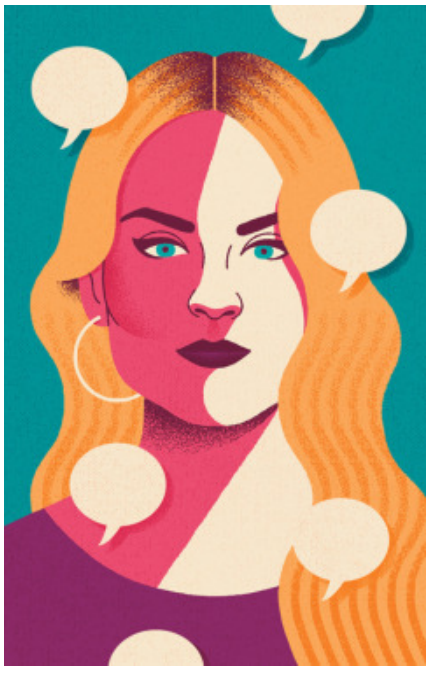
ON TELEVISION

"I'm a fifty-six-year-old man just trying to stay woke," Marc Maron says in his latest Netflix standup special, **"Marc Maron: End Times Fun."** He delivers the line in the self-rueful tone that is central to his art here, as on his podcast, in his acting work, and in his hall-of-fame appearances as a sardonic talk-show guest. Flowing from philosophical conundrum to dumbfounded observation, he is a droll raconteur of his own miserable confusion and a tart analyst of popular idiocies. The theme of this show is the end of the world, an evergreen topic that's grown even more timely. (You can read the show's title as an arithmetic promise: terminal despair multiplied by inquisitive mischief yields a sound seventy-one-minute act.) Maron speaks of existential terror, climate-change despair, and Trump-driven neural burnout, among other recent afflictions. The show closes with a bit that joins a recurring image of a flaming doomsday sky, a running gag about the religious zealotry of Marvel fanboys, and a riff on the homophobia of Mike Pence, braiding an apocalyptic fable that is holy in its clamorous profanity.—*Troy Patterson*

OPPOSITE: COURTESY FRIEZE AND ARARIO GALLERY; RIGHT: ILLUSTRATION BY JAMIE COE

R. & B.

JoJo was a cherubic thirteen-year-old in 2004, when she became the youngest female artist to top the *Billboard* pop chart with "Leave (Get Out)." The relationship kiss-off was silly given her age, yet it showed the promise of her voice—muscular, dusky, and precocious. After spending nearly a decade ensnared in legal and creative disputes with labels, she's taken the reins for her fourth record, a shadowy mosaic of R. & B. called "Good to Know," released on her own imprint. Songs such as "Man," with their sparse, bouncy beats, preserve the free, D.I.Y. spirit of mixtapes she's dropped over the years; others, including the convoluted morning-after musing "Pedialyte," are a bit underwhelming. Still, it's fascinating to watch her finally forge her own path through a tangled industry.—*Julyssa Lopez*



attributed to Martin Luther—alluding, perhaps, to the seductions of secular art. A fun-house-mirror distortion of Henry Mancini's "Peter Gunn" riff drives the burly, funky opening; a limpid central reverie prefaces a finale whose rhythms possess a demoniac swagger. In this recording, Yuja Wang, the soloist, performs with athleticism and grace; the orchestra, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel, matches her with power and atmosphere aplenty. Wang's splendid account of "China Gates," a brief piano work from 1977, provides an agreeably dreamy coda.—*Steve Smith*

Chad Taylor Trio: "The Daily Biological"

JAZZ The drummer and composer Chad Taylor—a onetime mainstay of Chicago's jazz scene who now resides in Philadelphia—has played to impressive effect with various permutations of the inventive Chicago Underground unit. The album "The Daily Biological" finds Taylor, resourceful and responsive as ever, leading a lean trio with the pianist Neil Podgurski and the tenor saxophonist Brian Settles, two players who share his inclination and ability to shift easily from serenity to improvisational fervor. The trio's animated interplay commands attention throughout the set, but the concluding piece, "Between Sound and Silence," is a most satisfying endgame: a carefully modulated and, in its hymnlike conclusion, poignant exchange among shrewd individualists who cohere as a band.—*Steve Futterman*

Diet Cig: "Do You Wonder About Me?"

INDIE ROCK Tantrums lose their petulance when they're thrown by the New York indie-rock duo Diet Cig. On the band's 2017 début album, "Swear I'm Good at This," its lead singer, Alex Luciano, alternated between whimpering and wailing—about forgotten birthdays, drunk fights, and bad boyfriends—but the sincerity of her voice against gleeful pop-punk melodies reflected youthful abandon rather than trivial foot-stamping. Her raucous energy has been tamed on "Do You Wonder About Me?," a sophomore effort that softens the group's once-scruffy edges and strives for vulnerability and maturity. Some moments, such as the melancholy interlude "Priority Mail," are built on delicate performances from Luciano, but the drum-driven "Flash Flood" is a reminder that the record could have used more of her delightfully rowdy outbursts.—*Julyssa Lopez*

GVSU New Music Ensemble: "Dawn Chorus"

CONTEMPORARY CLASSICAL The Grand Valley State University New Music Ensemble, an undergraduate group formed by the composer Bill Ryan, has made an impression with ambitious feats since its start, in 2006, and "Dawn Chorus" is among its most compelling ventures. The album features eleven appealing works from a series of commissions inspired by America's national parks and meant to be performed within them. Even in this studio recording, the elemental character conjured in the pieces—some sunny and frolicsome; others suffused with mystery and awe—is a welcome reminder of what endures just beyond our present isolation.—*S.S.*

Heartbeat Opera: "Lady M"

OPERA Lady Macbeth, with one soliloquy renouncing the bonds of her sex, gave villainesses in theatre and film a lodestar, and she takes center stage in "Lady M," Heartbeat Opera's reconception of Verdi's dark and stormy "Macbeth." The young, lean company previews its new production, due next spring, with a forty-five-minute "virtual soirée" that includes a short live performance, a music video of the sleepwalking scene, and a Q. & A. with singers. Attendees pay twenty dollars for a Zoom link to join the event, which is capped at twenty devices to maintain a salon-style intimacy.—*Oussama Zahr (May 11-20.)*

Caleb Landry Jones: "The Mother Stone"

ROCK As an actor, Caleb Landry Jones ("Get Out," "Twin Peaks") specializes in portraying off-kilter young men who seem one wrong glance away from snapping. Were these characters to sing, they would likely traffic in unnerving gothic country or bleak metal. But on his musical début, "The Mother Stone," Jones sets off on a different path, presenting a psychedelic song cycle that seems torn from a luminescent British reverie rather than from his own background, which involves a barn in Texas. Jones sidesteps the usual actor-trying-rock pitfalls by emphasizing offbeat sounds over persona, yet "The Mother Stone" does involve a form of acting: it traces patterns that were set decades ago by the likes of Syd Barrett, suggesting the soundtrack to someone else's nervous breakdown. As in Jones's film work, his record's strengths lie in the tics, tonal shifts, and nuances that lurk in the margins, threatening a meltdown.—*Jay Ruttenberg*

Kemistry & Storm: "DJ-Kicks"

DRUM AND BASS The London d.j. team of Kemistry (Valerie Olukemi A Olusanya) and Storm (Jayne Conneely) never produced any records, but their mark is all over nineties drum and bass—both on the decks and behind the scenes. (They handled A. & R. for the style's bellwether label, Metalheadz.) The duo's volume in the "DJ-Kicks" mix-CD series, now reissued digitally and on vinyl after years out of print, remains a definitive snapshot of drum and bass in its snarling techstep phase—white-noise snares, tarlike bass, permanently tense strings. The CD was originally released in January, 1999; only three months later, Kemistry died in a car accident, at the age of twenty-five.—*Michaelangelo Matos*

ART

"In Praise of Painting"

How great are the Met's holdings in the Dutch Golden Age? Very. This long-term installation rings the lower level of the Lehman Wing with scores of lesser-known gems from the mid-seventeenth century, many of them rarely on view before, amid masterworks by Rembrandt, Vermeer, Hals, and Ruisdael. The period, vivified here, began in 1648, when the end of the Eighty Years' War with Spain brought a boom in wealth and morale, expressed by genre paintings that exalt the national ideal of *gezelligheid*—social warmth, comfort, belonging. A key figure was Gerard ter Borch, who had travelled widely and worked at the court of Philip IV, in company with Velázquez. Ter Borch's lustrous, ineffably witty domestic scenes inspired a generation of masters, notably Vermeer, whose genius rather eclipsed his elder's. The pictures often star ter Borch's younger sister Gesina, preening in satins or enigmatically musing. Herself a painter, she is cutely funny-looking—pointy nose, weak chin—and desperately lovable. There's much

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL DIOSDADO

to be said for a world with such a family in it. (The Met is temporarily closed; a digital guide to the exhibition is available on the museum's Web site.)—*Peter Schjeldahl (themet.org)*

"Peter Saul"

The timeliest as well as the rudest painting show to open this year (at the New Museum) is also the first-ever New York museum survey of this American aesthetic rapscallion. Recognition so delayed bemuses almost as much as a reminder of the artist's current age: eighty-five, which seems impossible. Saul's cartoony style—raucously grotesque, often with contorted figures engaged in (and quite enjoying) intricate violence, caricatures of politicians from Nixon to Trump that come off as much fond as fierce, and cheeky travesties of classic paintings by Rembrandt, Picasso, and de Kooning—suggests the gall of an adolescent allowed to run amok. It takes time to become aware of how well Saul paints, with lyrically kinetic, intertwined forms and an improbable approximation of chiaroscuro, managed with neon-toned Day-Glo acrylics. He sneaks whispery formal nuances into works whose predominant effect may be as subtle as that of a steel garbage can being kicked downstairs. Not everyone takes the time. Saul's effrontery has long driven fastidious souls, including me years ago, from galleries. Now I see him as part of a story of art and culture that has been unspooling since the nineteen-fifties; one in which Saul, formerly a pariah, seems ever more a paladin. (The New Museum is temporarily closed; take a virtual tour of Saul's exhibition, "Crime and Punishment," on its Web site.)—*P.S. (newmuseum.org)*

Zsófia Keresztes

In her first outing in the United States, this Hungarian artist proves herself to be a master of the mixed message—her glass-tile sculptures use a deceptively cheerful palette of peach, periwinkle, and canary yellow to confront the subject of sadness. (Images of Keresztes's work are on the artist-run Bushwick space Elijah Wheat Showroom's Web site, and are also featured in Platform: New York, a sleek online viewing room launched by the Zwirner gallery to give increased visibility to its peers during the pandemic.) The show's centerpiece is "The Failure," a psychedelic update of memorial statuary, in which five giant teardrops dwarf two weeping eyes, an effect that becomes gradually more unsettling the longer you look at it. Nearby, a pair of chunky, coral-colored spiderwebs glisten with similar sky-blue tears. The artist seems to be making a statement about both the futility of repressing difficult emotions and the perils of putting a gloss on them.—*Johanna Fateman (elijahwheatshowroom.com)*

Tussen Kunst & Quarantaine

This gold mine of an Instagram account, run by the Dutch art lover Anneloes Officier, is approaching its two-month anniversary, but its crowdsourced ingenuity shows no signs of letting up. People living on lockdown are continuing to answer her call to re-create art-historical tableaux using what they have lying around the house. Early on, two women in a messy living room threw down the gauntlet with a spontaneous, delightfully unhinged version of Jacques-Louis David's "Napoleon Crossing the Alps," in which a length of red fabric lends much of the drama. Soon afterward, a more carefully planned take on Botticelli turned up—a Madonna with a yellow towel for a halo, cradling four toilet-paper rolls in lieu of a baby. More recently, "The Threatened Swan," Jan Asselijn's masterpiece of the Dutch Golden Age, appeared as a compositionally spot-on abstraction formed by an assortment of white gloves. These examples just scratch the surface: the project is a vast, ever-growing archive of postcards from stir-crazy comrades around the world.—*J.F. (@tussenkunstenquarantaine)*

MOVIES

The Clock

Judy Garland's first non-musical, from 1945, is a breathlessly rhapsodic romance. It starts at Penn Station, with the arrival of a young Midwesterner in uniform, Corporal Joe Allen (Robert Walker), on a forty-eight-hour pass. He and Alice Maybery (Garland), a secretary, meet cute and spend the day seeing the city's sights. Joe can't stop talking about his home town, his family, his childhood—in effect, uploading his memory to her in case he dies in combat. The title refers both to a real clock, at a hotel, and to the universal one that the lovers are racing against. The countdown turns the tale into a frenzied thriller, intensified by the stars' frenzied performances. Though the director Vincente Minnelli's swoony style unites the city and the lovers in a collective dream, he saves the most sensual moments for closeups of Garland. As Alice falls into Joe's embrace under the misty lights of Central Park, the tremors of her eyebrows register as historic events.—*Richard Brody (Streaming on Amazon, iTunes, and other services.)*

Don't Come Knocking

This bittersweet blues of the modern West, from 2005, directed by Wim Wenders from a script by Sam Shepard, is a minor-key delight. Shepard also stars, as Howard Spence, an aging star of Westerns and a legendary tabloid troublemaker who wants out: he sneaks off set and finds his mother (Eva Marie Saint), whom he hasn't seen in decades. She lets slip a word about his son, whom he has never met, and he heads for Butte, Montana, to look for him. There, Howard finds not just his son, Earl (Gabriel Mann), and Earl's mother, Doreen (Jessica Lange), but also a daughter, Sky (Sarah Polley). Overcoming implausible twists, Shepard's sharp writing memorably delineates the quartet's struggles to connect, and Wenders keeps the outer and inner journeys in delicate balance; the movie's ballad-like moods ring true.—*R.B. (Streaming on Amazon, iTunes, and other services.)*

PERFORMANCE ART ONLINE

If your nighttime routine now includes insomnia, **Morgan Bassichis** wants you to know that you're not alone. Since New York City hit Pause in March, the irresistibly charismatic performer—whose sui-generis style blends cabaret panache and standup shtick with grace notes of klezmer—has been posting comforting "quarantunes" on Instagram (@morgankindof), including the lullaby "I know it's weird to go to bed now." Like the full-length performances that have earned Bassichis a loyal following from Fire Island to the Whitney Museum, the intimate clip is funny, strange, exquisitely sung, and unexpectedly moving. (A selection of videos of past events is available on morganbassichis.com.) Onstage, Bassichis often repeats simple lyrics—"I know you're scared, I'm scared too"—until they accrue the power of incantations. The quarantunes have that same magic, along with some good advice for bad times: "I'll tell you the secret. Take a shower."—*Andrea K. Scott*

ILLUSTRATION BY OHNI LISLE

The English Patient

Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, based on the novel by Michael Ondaatje, this long and searching movie, from 1996, brings together many stories. First, there is an adulterous love affair between Almásy (Ralph Fiennes) and Katherine (Kristin Scott Thomas), which unfolds in North Africa before the outbreak of the Second World War. Then, as the war winds down, the badly burned Almásy is cared for in an abandoned Italian monastery by a French-Canadian nurse (Juliette Binoche), who has an affair with a Sikh soldier (Naveen Andrews). Then the mysterious Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe), a scavenging thief who appears to know the secrets of Almásy's past, shows up. All these plotlines interweave and tauten right up to the unbearable romantic tension of the climax. The triumph of the film lies not just in the force and the range of the performances—the crisp sweetness of Scott Thomas, say, versus the raw volatility of Binoche—but in Minghella's creation of an intimate epic: vast landscapes mingle with the minute details of desire, and the combination is transfixing.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 11/25/96.) (Streaming on Amazon, Hulu, and other services.)*

Frankie

With an international cast of characters in a complex skein of relationships, the director Ira Sachs gives this intimate story a wide scope. Isabelle Huppert stars as Françoise Crémont, nicknamed Frankie, a famous French actress, dying of cancer, who summons her loved ones for a sentimental gathering in the Portuguese seaside village of Sintra. The guests, in turn, bring others; the result is a melancholy and melodramatic roundelay, in which haphazard encounters and delayed reunions mesh with the intense circumstances (and the spectacular locations) to unleash stifled conflicts. Marisa Tomei, who costars as Frankie's friend Ilene, a movie-business hair stylist, brings a quiet ferocity to sudden new reckonings. The well-modulated cast includes Brendan Gleeson, Sennia Nanua, and Jérémie Renier; Sachs displays, in climactic moments, an inspired reserve that fills poised frames with powerful feelings. In English, French, and Portuguese.—*R.B. (Streaming on iTunes and elsewhere.)*

We Live in Public

The filmmaker Ondi Timoner was a participant in some of the most dramatic events in her documentary, from 2009, about the reckless and elusive Internet pioneer Josh Harris, who sensed the Web's transformative power as early as 1980. In the nineties, he founded Pseudo.com, a New York-based streaming video and audio site, hiring and unleashing a horde of artists in an environment that one observer likens to Andy Warhol's Factory. Then he tried to realize his plans for interactive virtual reality in a basement commune—which he compared to a concentration camp. Volunteers moved in and signed themselves over, allowing their every action, including bed and bath activities, to be recorded. Timoner was there, and is captured in Harris's disturbing yet fascinating archival footage. In Timoner's insider view, Harris—artist, con artist, and businessman; genius, clown, and control freak—is graced and cursed with a visionary strangeness; he brought forth real-life horrors as well as dark wonders, which she in turn rescues from oblivion.—*R.B. (Streaming on Amazon, iTunes, and other services.)*

Win a Date with Tad Hamilton!

The setup of this romantic comedy, directed by Robert Luketic, seems to come straight from the nineteen-thirties: a small-town girl named Rosalee Futch (Kate Bosworth), a supermarket cashier, gets a chance to meet her Hollywood idol (Josh Duhamel) when she wins a charity contest concocted to clean up his bad-boy image. When a relationship develops between them, a local boy who secretly loves her, Pete Monash (Topher Grace)—who is also her boss—must fight for her heart. Like studio-era classics, this whimsical tale runs on hints and allusions: the tight plot delivers an intimate drama in dialogue-rich confrontations, with the characters' anachronistic innocence linked to a shrewd, subtly implicit undercurrent of Christian faith. Grace is especially persuasive as an intellectual in constraining circumstances, whose system for maintaining his mind and his dignity collapses when his romantic dreams are threatened. The result is a surprising triumph of unexpected substance over conventional style. Released in 2004.—*R.B. (Streaming on Amazon, iTunes, and other services.)*

Yeelen

The Malian director Souleymane Cissé's historical drama, from 1987, is a masterwork of metaphysical realism. It's based on a thirteenth-century legend about a sorcerer, Nianankoro, whose jealous father, Soma, also a master of magic, is plotting to kill him. Niananokoro's journey of escape turns out to be a classic voyage of initiation: he uses his magical powers to help a suspicious king, takes a wife, and has a son, but he can't elude his father's deadly wrath. Cissé's grandly imaginative visual artistry renders the magical world concrete; he films the story from the perspective of its characters, for whom the supernatural realm, the domain of divine powers embodied on earth, is physical and evident. The title means "brightness," and it's ultimately the cosmic power of light itself that comes to the fore in a terrifying conflagration. The filmmaker's point of view, however, is steadfastly political: he dramatizes the patriarchal abuse of power and the price of resistance, however legitimate. In Bambara and Fula.—*R.B. (Streaming on Kanopy and other services.)*

For more reviews, visit
newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town

WHAT TO STREAM

With its round-the-clock emphasis on Hollywood classics, TCM is the virtual American cinémathèque (and most of its programming is also streaming on the Watch TCM app). This week, the channel offers rare masterworks, such as Howard Hawks's "Tiger Shark" (May 7), and a twenty-four-hour festival of tap dancing (May 11). This twelve-film cycle includes "Singin' in the Rain," "42nd Street," and "Top Hat," along with the documentary "No Maps on My Taps" and the 1943 musical comedy **"Stormy Weather,"** which features an entire cast of black performers, spotlighting some of the most celebrated artists of the time—Bill Robinson (whose life story is the basis of the plot), Lena Horne, Cab Calloway, Katherine Dunham, Fats Waller, and the Nicholas Brothers. It also features an extraordinary mystery artist—a man who turns up in a backstage sequence to do a high-kicking, light-stepping, sinuously athletic dance. Not only is he uncredited; his name has apparently gone unrecorded in history, a fate that reflects a time when Hollywood employed black actors but not black writers, directors, or producers.—*Richard Brody*

TABLES FOR TWO

Contrair
138 Orchard St.

The other day, at around 6:45 P.M., an iPad lit up at Contrair, perhaps New York's only brand-new restaurant. On it was takeout order 63627: one jerk chicken, one crab congee, one lamb birria. Contrair is run by Jeremiah Stone and Fabián von Hauske Valtierra, the chefs behind the Lower East Side tasting-menu spot Contra and Wildair, a natural-wine bar next door—well-loved restaurants that nail that rare hat trick of being impeccably cool, winningly laid-back, and culinarily thrilling. But at the beginning of April, with their dining rooms closed because of the coronavirus, and artful small plates far from people's minds, Stone and von Hauske Valtierra decided that their gastronomic future lay, at least temporarily, in stews, grills, and braises, packaged to go. (Contrair's portmanteau name doubles as a punning bit of gallows humor: "You might ask 'Are you guys closed?'" Stone said, "and we can be, like, '*Au Contrair!*'")

Countless restaurants in New York have shifted, of late, to takeout and delivery, and many have changed their menus—but few have taken on entirely new identities. To Stone and von Hauske Valtierra, reincarnating as Contrair was an aesthetic decision as much as a practical one. "I ordered some takeout from a place that's quite expensive, and it just looked sad," Stone said. Rustic cooking travels better, he found. He ran a quality-control experiment, sending deliveries to friends (and to von Hauske Valtierra, who had spent the early weeks of the social-distancing era housebound with bronchitis); he'd take a "before" photo, and ask them to send him an "after."

In the morning, four days a week, Stone and von Hauske Valtierra prep lunches for medical workers; in the afternoon, they turn their attention to Contrair. For order 63627, Stone placed a chicken leg—which had cured in salt for a day, then marinated in jerk spices for another—on the grill, where its skin would become crisp and dark around the sweet, smoky meat; it would be plated in a compostable clamshell with collards, squash, and pigeon peas. Another cook filled a paper bowl with rice, purple cabbage, chickpeas, cilantro, and thin slices of red onion, an eventual home for the velvet-tender lamb birria (which arrives separately, in its dark, savory broth), then filled a quart container with golden ladlefuls of congee, packed alongside fried wonton wrappers tossed with Old Bay seasoning.

Even in the best of times, restaurants run on razor-thin margins; right now, between revenue from Contrair and income from their hospital contract (paid for, philanthropically, by Verizon), Stone and von Hauske Valtierra barely break even. "We're not squandering any resources," Stone said. "André Soltner told me that if you crack twelve eggs, the amount you leave behind is basically an extra egg, so you should do this"—he swiped his thumb inside each cracked shell, scooping out any lingering whites. Rice left over from the previous day's birria is repurposed for the congee; scallion ends, scraps from making congee, are charred and added to the marinade for the next day's birria.

By 7:10, order 63627 was neatly bundled, the food packaged up with a rum cocktail of Stone's invention, made with beet syrup and orange bitters; two bottles of wine (like many desperate restaurants, they're selling off their cellar at near-cost prices); and two of von Hauske Valtierra's marvellous dirt cups, cloudlike hazelnut pudding layered with praline and chocolate, garnished jauntily with Haribo gummies purchased from the still open bodega down the block.

At 7:15, a customer arrived to pick up her order. She stepped just inside the front door of the erstwhile Contra dining room, where three tables had been repurposed as a makeshift barricade. A wireless doorbell cued a staffer to slide the bagged order across the polished wood. Outside, Orchard Street was gloomy with evening shadows; the sidewalks, usually crowded with bons vivants waiting for tables, were empty. As she left, the customer sent brief arcs of light and snippets of sound onto the street. Then everything was quiet and dark again. *(Entrées $14–$19.)*

—Helen Rosner

PHOTOGRAPH BY HARUKA SAKAGUCHI FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

The trading platform you'd build (if you built trading platforms).

Customize your view of the market so you can focus on what's important to you with thinkorswim®. Create your own indicators with thinkScript®, visualize the market with custom charting, and use personal predictions to forecast the values of stocks you care about with the Company Profile tool. And, this award-winning investing experience is now commission-free.*

See what customization can do for your trades at **tdameritrade.com/thinkorswim**

TD Ameritrade® | **Where Smart Investors Get Smarter℠**

***Applies to U.S. exchange-listed stocks, ETFs, and options. A $0.65 per contract fee applies for options trades.**

Company Profile forecasts are hypothetical, based on user-defined assumptions, and not guaranteed. All investing involves risks, including loss of principal. TD Ameritrade, Inc., member FINRA/SIPC. © 2019 TD Ameritrade.

THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
REOPENING ARGUMENTS

The fatal confusion of the United States' response to the coronavirus crisis is now moving to a more disjointed stage: the rush to reopen. Last week, as statewide stay-at-home orders began to expire, governors from Alabama to Missouri softened or declined to extend them. The new measures are a hodgepodge: Texas is allowing movie theatres to reopen, with some limits, but not gyms. Georgia allows both—and massage and tattoo parlors. Some of the steps seem influenced less by epidemiology than by industry lobbies and excessive attention paid to scattered protests. (Polls show that most Americans support closures.) The Attorney General, William Barr, has told prosecutors to look for and take action against "overbearing" restrictions. President Trump, who has left reopening decisions to the states, offering only loose guidelines, does not seem especially worried that moving too quickly might lead to more waves of death from COVID-19. "If there's a fire, we're going to put it out," he said, on Wednesday. The danger is that reopening will become an act of mass arson.

A key point of closures and social distancing was to slow the spread—to flatten the curve—so that the first wave of the pandemic would not overwhelm the health-care system. Those actions bought time to prepare hospitals, develop treatments, and get closer to a vaccine. Perhaps above all, time was needed to make widespread testing available, and to follow it up with contact tracing. As much as President Trump has claimed otherwise, that effort has hardly begun. Texas has tested only about one per cent of its population, and cases are not yet declining there in a sustained way. In Indiana and Minnesota, which are pushing to reopen, cases are rising. Even New York, which is testing more people than many countries, doesn't seem to have the tests it needs to provide an accurate death toll. More than five thousand presumed COVID victims in New York City have been excluded from the state tally because they were never tested, complicating attempts to assess the disease's trajectory.

Still, given the heavy social burdens of the closures, some states are drawing up more cautious, calibrated plans. Governor Andrew Cuomo, of New York, has said that he intends to allow hospitals in some upstate counties, which have been less hard hit, to resume performing elective procedures—a category that includes many cancer surgeries. He also has committed New York to work in concert with six other Northeastern states, so that they do not end up undercutting one another's efforts. California, Oregon, and Washington have formed a similar partnership. Reopening is, in fact, a matter not of relaxation but of vigilance. Governor Gavin Newsom, of California, has begun talking about opening schools in July, to make up for lost days, but he also closed the state's beaches, after crowds of people flocked to them.

Some who argue for reopening sooner rather than later say that doing so will allow for a "controlled spread" of the disease, in which more people can develop a resistance and the population as a whole can achieve "herd immunity." One problem with this approach is the projected number of hospitalizations and deaths along the way, which is very high. Another is that the idea assumes that those who have had COVID-19 will, indeed, be immune. But, as the World Health Organization recently warned, it isn't yet clear how effective or enduring any immunity might be. There are viruses, such as measles, for which the immunity is lifelong; for SARS and MERS, which are coronaviruses, immunity seems to fade, on average, in a couple of years. For the four other known human coronaviruses, which cause varieties of the common cold, immunity lasts just months.

Meanwhile, the F.D.A. has allowed

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

companies to market a grab bag of serological tests, meant to detect a prior infection, even though they tend to give high rates of false positives, possibly mistaking antibodies that a person has acquired from fighting off a cold for the remnants of a battle with COVID-19. That is a shaky basis on which, say, to send a health worker back into a nursing home. Without coherent, stringent standards, the field of serological testing will remain in a hazardous state, threatening a cruel replay of the disastrous problems with diagnostic testing.

The discussion around reopening often draws a distinction between "the vulnerable" and everybody else, as if our strength were not defined by our willingness to stand together. Reading Texas's reopening plan, one would think that only the elderly are vulnerable. Yet one of the risk factors for death from COVID-19 is obesity, which affects a third of the adults in the South and the Midwest. And diabetes is a major factor in the many deaths of people who are relatively young. There is a misperception, too, that only cities are susceptible, in spite of the fact that some rural areas have been devastated. The most dangerous illusion one can have in a pandemic is that it is only happening to other people, someplace else.

The absurdity of some of the reopening measures—tattoo parlors?—raises the possibility that the public may be reluctant to follow the governors' lead. Businesses may decide to stay closed or to keep their employees working from home. People may decide not to go to restaurants or malls or to take public transportation. But those with fewer financial resources may not have the luxury to choose safer ways of living. Last week, officials in Iowa and Nebraska made it clear that anyone who declines to go back to work will risk losing unemployment benefits. Many low-wage workers—in grocery stores, hospitals, and the meatpacking plants that Trump has ordered to stay open, even as they have become centers of outbreaks—have never stopped showing up. Moreover, as the COVID Tracking Project noted, in South Dakota, a state that is almost ninety per cent white, people of color account for close to seventy per cent of the confirmed cases—a reflection of the demographics of meatpackers, and of wider disparities.

Reopening should be something other than a lopsided reapportionment of risk. Nor can it rely on wishful thinking or luck. It requires hard, deliberate work, with clear prerequisites: testing, contact tracing, leadership, mask-wearing, individual discipline, and a willingness, if cases spike, to change course. It can be done, but we have to get it right.

—Amy Davidson Sorkin

DOLLARS AND CENTS
CAN'T-PAY MAY

Two rent payments ago, Donald Trump announced what he termed some "really positive things" for millions of people who were nervous about evictions during the economic shutdown. "Landlords are going to take it easy!" he said. This was not rhetoric: Trump International Hotel, in Washington, D.C., soon asked for rent relief from its own landlord, the federal government, which has yet to announce a decision on whether to grant it. (Evictions continued apace at the real-estate firm owned by Jared Kushner.) Despite the news, rent was still due on April 1st for most American renters, and nearly a third of them couldn't pay. More were expected to fall off the books for May.

"I have seven hundred and seventy-three dollars in my bank account," Winsome Pendergrass, a Jamaican-born domestic worker, said at the end of last month. "My rent is nine hundred and fifty-eight dollars and sixty-five cents. I paid in April, but now I can't. I call it Can't-Pay May."

Pendergrass, who is sixty-two, sat on a sofa in the two-and-a-half-bedroom apartment in Brownsville that she shares with her daughter, her granddaughter, and a lot of plants. She is trying to turn missed rent payments into a movement. She belongs to New York Communities for Change, a group that has organized a rent strike among its five thousand members. "We try to encourage our members: Have a conversation with your landlord," she said. "But many landlords are pushing papers under their doors saying, 'Your responsibility is to pay.'"

New York State has banned evictions until mid-June, and a bill proposed in the City Council seeks to extend the grace period to April, 2021, in the five boroughs, but renters will have to make up missed payments. Pendergrass and her group have called on Trump and Governor Andrew Cuomo to cancel rents and mortgages permanently for the duration of the stay-at-home order.

Pendergrass was getting ready for a rent-strike meeting, held on Zoom, for renters across the city. She wore red lipstick and earrings in the shape of leaves. Around dinnertime, video feeds started popping up on her screen. Fifty-eight people attended the last meeting. This time, there were a hundred and eighty-eight.

People shared their stories. Peggy Perkins (1 BR, $1,336, Hempstead, mold problems) said she'd been homeless, with three children, before finally finding financial stability. She'd just registered a name for a beauty parlor she planned to open: Luxurious LaBelle Hair and Spa. She was applying for a loan when the coronavirus hit. No more haircuts, no more income. She tried talking to her landlord, but he wouldn't negotiate. (He said he needs the money to pay his employees, such as the building's superintendent.)

Another woman, Donnette (1½ BR, $1,700, Canarsie), had been working as a home health aide but lost her job on April 12th, when her client, who was ninety-eight, died from the virus. Donnette stayed with the woman at her nursing home, because her family wasn't allowed in. "I refused to leave her," she said. "It was a choice. It was no longer employment, but it was duty." Donnette said she could get by for a few months, if she zeroed out her savings. She didn't expect to receive a stimulus check, because she is an undocumented immigrant, from Jamaica. "I'm trying

to do the math, and I can't make sense of it," she said.

"She's not a lazy person," Pendergrass said of Donnette, after the meeting. "As they say, a Jamaican's always got three jobs. And is going to school. But the hammer is over her head." Pendergrass is now a U.S. citizen. She thought her own three-job days were over, but she figures that, without assistance, she'll have to start working extended hours, seven days a week, to keep her apartment. Recently, she called her life-insurance company to ask about taking money out.

A man in an oversized gray shirt began to speak. He was nervous about the strike. "All the people I know are very scared," he said, in Spanish. "We're not going to pay rent for two or three months? O.K., that's fine, but what about after? We're going to be in debt."

Pendergrass jumped in. If they couldn't pay, she said, they were better off not paying together. "We are just forcing Albany to address renters," she said. "We are the sufferers."

People kept talking and listening, and, inside their little Zoom squares, they went about their evening routines. A woman fried tortillas. A man wearing a gold chain hugged a Teddy bear. A woman brushed a girl's hair. On the walls were portraits of Jesus, graduation photos, and finger paintings. The sun went down and lamps turned on. The apartments were neat and messy and nice and dingy, but they were all, for the moment, home.

—Zach Helfand

L.A. POSTCARD
4/20 REPORT

Late last month, while President Trump flirted with solutions to the coronavirus—sunbathing with a "very powerful light," injecting Lysol to clean the lungs—others elected to smoke pot. In Los Angeles, as a queue of cars crept slowly in a two-hour In-N-Out Burger drive-through line, in Hollywood, a string of people, standing six feet apart, snaked down the block outside the MMD cannabis dispensary.

Mishka Ashbel, who co-owns the dispensary with his brother, Slava, said, "We get to provide a little relief to a stressed society." Los Angeles, which shuttered its beaches and hiking trails, has deemed weed an essential service, critical to residents' health and well-being. "On 4/20, a lot of people used coming to a dispensary as an excuse to get out of the house, to feel normal again," Ashbel said. "To stand in that line was like a special occasion. People placed online orders for delivery starting at 4 A.M." (Seniors get their gummies, organic pre-rolled joints, and edibles delivered free.)

"Vice industries," such as the liquor business, do well during recessions and crises; in the first days of the shutdown, marijuana stocks outperformed the crashing S. & P. Ashbel does not consider cannabis a vice product. "This is a health product," he said. "You feel this responsibility to the public here—we're on the front lines. It's uncharted territory."

A former N.F.L. player was reprimanded by the F.D.A. for advocating cannabis as a cure for COVID-19, but many have found it crucial in coping with the pandemic. David Lonsdale, the C.E.O. of a hemp-cultivation company called CanaFarma, weighed in by phone from his Manhattan apartment. "People are looking at an over-all wellness program," he said. "Cannabis becomes part of your daily routine, like blood-pressure medicine."

"People are used to self-medicating, and it's medical, yeah," a Broadway actor who works part time as a budtender said. "But people are also just bored."

Rudy Schreier, a cannabis consultant, said, "You wake up, you have a good breakfast, you maybe take some vitamins, you do work, you have lunch, do more work, smoke a joint, eat an edible. It's becoming the norm since we've been on lockdown." Schreier works with dispensaries to help them secure licenses. "A lot of people working from home have more time on their hands now," he said. "In a world that's so hectic, everyone's wish was to have more time, and now that that wish has been granted people are, like, 'I don't know what to do.' That's where cannabis comes into play." He went on, "I live in a house with seven other people, and during the quarantine we've had a couple of girlfriends here, too, so it's like twelve of us, and pretty much everyone is smoking every day. People finish whatever they have to do for their job at, like, 2 P.M., and they're, like, 'What are we going to do for the rest of the day?'"

Schreier rushed out to two dispensaries the day that L.A.'s mayor, Eric

Garcetti, advised residents to begin staying home. Since then, he's put two cloned baby cannabis plants in his back yard. "I think that Lowe's and Home Depot have a surge in sales, and I assume that part of that is gardening supplies," he said. "We expect home-grows to go way up."

There's a side benefit to the boom: the process of extracting cannabis oil requires ethanol, so manufacturers have started producing hand sanitizer in bulk to supply the dispensaries, for customers to use. "At first, it was like a back-yard drug deal for hand sanitizers," Ashbel said.

Ashbel thinks that smoking pot is the ideal quarantine activity. "It's conducive to isolation, and it turns off the sensory overload from the news right now," he said. His brother, Slava, said, "Smoking cannabis has helped people stay inside for generations!" He added, "I didn't realize I've been quarantined full time since 2006."

Mark Haskell Smith, a novelist who has written about the marijuana industry, agrees. "How else are you going to

play eight hours of video games?" he said. He celebrated 4/20 by smoking a joint during a special holiday Pilates class on Zoom.

Mishka Ashbel makes a point of educating his customers about safe smoking during the pandemic. "We're telling people, 'Don't pass the doob around,'" he said. One dispensary's Web site offers a guide for hygienic toking: "Use protection. . . . Bong condoms slip right into the top of a bong so you don't have to put your mouth where someone else's was." Another thing to watch out for, Ashbel noted: "You might end up eating all of your quarantine food supplies."

—Antonia Hitchens

VOLUNTEER DEPT.
TEEN SPIRIT

On a recent Thursday, in Portland, Oregon, McCaleb Nesseler-Cass got out of bed five minutes before his ten o'clock check-in at Central Catholic High School. "It doesn't compare to real school," he said of the online version. He went back to sleep. After lunch, he headed to the basement to lift weights. "Self-care," he said. "I've got my weights. I've got my video games. And sanitizing carts at Trader Joe's," where he works on the weekends. ("Makes people feel better.") After an hour of reading about "the five pillars of Islam," and a couple playing Super Smash Bros., he got into his Toyota Sienna, cranked up "Althea"—Grateful Dead, 1980—and drove to an office where he volunteers at YouthLine, a crisis line for teens.

"It's not for school or anything," McCaleb, who is eighteen, said. "Men, especially, hide their feelings. I just try to support them." He wore a tie-dyed Dead T-shirt, jeans, and skater shoes, on which he'd scrawled, "People who do this suck." Irony. He arrived at the office, where seven other teen-age volunteers—all girls—were seated and masked at their spaced-out desks. A supervisor pointed a thermometer gun at McCaleb's forehead. "You're good," she said. McCaleb masked up and said hi to a schoolmate named Maddi, who was wearing knee-high boots and had pasted rhinestones around her eyes.

In March, YouthLine received nearly twenty-two hundred messages and calls, compared with around fourteen hundred twelve months earlier. The virus has necessitated a larger room. "More space is dope," McCaleb said. The air was thick with the scent of hand sanitizer and the sound of typing. Also, Beyoncé.

After wiping down his desk, McCaleb checked the messages on his computer. "This person is a preteen," he said, examining the first one. "They're having trouble with their gender identity." He added, "They're really scared to tell their parents while quarantined." McCaleb typed a response. "They asked me how old I am," he said—a question that the volunteers frequently get from callers. "I said I'm in high school. I didn't want to say I'm eighteen—that could be kind of imposing." (Later, he gently told another caller, "I'm not an adult," but the caller didn't believe him, and hung up.) McCaleb turned to schoolwork while he waited for another message to ping. "I have this A.P. Bio video lecture on DNA," he said. "Which is annoying."

Maddi said, "When I was here last week, I had two contacts talk about the virus pretty much the whole time." They felt trapped. Maddi, who lives in an apartment with her mother, related—to a point. "One was talking about how it was making them feel even more suicidal," she said. "They were into writing, so I said it would be really fun to write letters to friends or family." The idea seemed to take.

McCaleb Nesseler-Cass

To Maddi's left, Sophie, seventeen, who wore a baggy sweatshirt, played Animal Crossing on her Nintendo Switch between calls. "You live on a little island with all these animals," she said of the game. "You, like, fish and catch bugs. It's really cute and stress-relieving." She talked about recent chats. "I've gotten abusive situations," she said. "Now they can't get out and go to school and escape that. They ask, 'How long is this gonna be?'"

Nearby, Beth, another seventeen-year-old, wearing an olive crop top, responded to a new message. "Are you in crisis now?" she typed. "This is the crisis line." The person, who was nine, had tried to snuggle a pet mouse during an anxious moment in quarantine, and had inadvertently choked the animal. "They're suicidal," Beth told Morgan, a middle-aged woman supervising the group.

"You're amazing and wonderful," Morgan replied, "but I'm going to take that." After a moment, Morgan ascertained that the creature had survived. "It's sleeping now in its cage," she said.

A veteran volunteer across the room ended a call. "It's so wild how some people just don't have boundaries," she said to the others, sighing. She took another call, this time recommending a hot bath or shower. "The other thing I'd maybe recommend," she continued, "is an app called Calm Harm, which can sometimes help when you're having really intense self-harm urges."

Beth took another call. It lasted awhile. A seventeen-year-old had gone to her doctor to get tested for the virus and learned she was pregnant. "Awful timing," Beth said to the caller, after calming her down.

McCaleb's last chat was with a teenager whose sibling had recently died by suicide. "Their parents aren't very responsive," he said. "Like, a pat on the back and 'You're good.'" He shook his head. "Virus or no virus, it's just hard." He listened to "Althea" again on the drive home. The name, he later learned, means "healer."

—Charles Bethea

DEPT. OF GRATITUDE
PAMELA MAFFEI McCARTHY

Of the many things that we've missed in these bewildering weeks of homebound distancing, one is the ability to mark properly the joyful passages of life: births, graduations, weddings, anniversaries. A FaceTime toast or a Zoom-ed congratulations hardly feels sufficient, but, for now, in-person festivities must be deferred for safer, sunnier days. Here at *The New Yorker*, we had plans to celebrate the astonishing career of our dear friend and colleague Pamela Maffei McCarthy, who has been the magazine's deputy editor since 1995, and who decided not long ago that the time had come to spend her days doing something new. It wasn't easy for any of us to accept this news—no one is more respected or adored at One World Trade Center. And yet no one is more deserving of a next chapter. This is Pam's last issue, and, while we're keeping the champagne on ice for a little longer, we want to thank and celebrate her here.

In the earliest years of *The New Yorker*, Harold Ross, its founding editor, always said he was looking for a "Jesus"—someone who could keep his venture calm and steady, fending off crisis, bringing the good news. He never quite found that savior. In Pam McCarthy, *The New Yorker* finally got what Ross was searching for: here was someone who would find, shepherd, and protect every variety of talent, a diplomat who could quiet troubled waters, a businessperson who could multiply loaves and fishes. In no small measure, today's *New Yorker* would not exist without her and the extraordinary people she found, put into place, and promoted. The building started the moment she arrived; now she leaves the magazine transformed, expanded, and healthy. She did it not only with editorial acuity and business savvy but with immense depth of character, kindness, and generosity.

Pam McCarthy started her career at *Esquire*, where, first as a proofreader and later as executive editor, she learned every skill that magazines demand, on and off the page. She learned how to make things sing and how to make things run. As Tina Brown's managing editor at *Vanity Fair*, she became an essential figure in that title's rebirth and flourishing. In "The Vanity Fair Diaries: 1983-1992," Brown describes her as "miraculous," arriving on the scene and, in no time at all, taking everything in hand: editorial debates, fact-checking disputes, restive egos, production snarls, budgetary headaches, legal quandaries.

When Brown succeeded Robert Gottlieb as the editor of *The New Yorker*, she brought Pam with her to help revitalize its pages with new writers and artists. *The New Yorker* entered the modern age gradually—and then, it seemed, all at once, adding a Web site, then a *fuller* Web site, podcasts, video, newsletters, a radio show. At each step, Pam championed change while making sure that our editorial soul remained true and our business prospects solid. And, even as she shouldered the countless details required to make *The New Yorker* sail straight, Pam, often on weekends, provided other editors with editorial counsel. Invariably, her suggestions were about fairness, discipline, and tone. She has deep confidence in the power of facts, and she is wary of the cheap shot, the flash of hyperbole, the rickety insinuation. "She protected our business—and that was a huge thing," as one of us put it. "But her editorial protection was the thing I valued the most."

Pam McCarthy made sure that we could achieve our greatest ambitions while managing to be a fair-minded, decent, and financially sustainable workplace. Filling a role that once seemed impossible, she has proved one of the most important and influential people to walk through the doors of *The New Yorker* since the place opened, in midtown, ninety-five years ago. We've long ceased to marvel at her ability to create calm from the stuff of crisis. Working miracles, as Ross knew, was always part of the job description.

—The Editors

SKETCHPAD
A NEW YORK MASQUERADE

Spanx shorts
"Look, Jules! I'm wearing Mom's underwear." —Julia's dad
canvas inside, thick woven fabric outside
"Good thing my eyes are my best feature." —Pooja
traditional Japanese handkerchief
"I used to use it for wrapping bento boxes." —Aya
100% silk
"It's Hermès. I was always nervous to wear it out of the house." —Rachel

BY JULIA ROTHMAN AND SHAINA FEINBERG

ANNALS OF MEDICINE

THE WARNINGS

Why we should have known to prepare for COVID-19.

BY DAVID QUAMMEN

"This is about lack of imagination," Ali Khan, formerly of the C.D.C., said.

PHOTOGRAPH BY WALKER PICKERING

In 2006, the idea that an unknown virus might spill out of some wild animal into humans, achieving person-to-person transmission and causing a global pandemic, seemed a distant prospect to most people. As an engaging science-fiction scare, it ranked somewhere beneath "Alien: Resurrection." But Ali S. Khan, of the National Center for Zoonotic, Vector-Borne, and Enteric Diseases, was tasked with dreaming that nightmare by daylight.

NCZVED (pronounced "N.C. Zved," according to Khan), part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, resided in an unobtrusive gray brick building, behind locked gates and locked doors in the C.D.C.'s compound on Clifton Road, six miles northeast of downtown Atlanta. During a two-day visit that year, I worked my way along the NCZVED corridors, interviewing scientists who knew all about Ebola viruses (yes, there are more than one) and their lethal cousin Marburg; about West Nile virus in the Bronx and Sin Nombre virus in Arizona; about simian foamy virus in Bali, which is carried by temple monkeys that crawl over tourists, and monkeypox, which reached Illinois in giant Gambian rats sold as pets; about Junin virus in Argentina and Machupo virus in Bolivia; about Lassa virus in West Africa, Nipah virus in Malaysia, Hendra virus in Australia, and rabies everywhere. All these viruses are zoonotic, meaning that they can pass from animals to people. Most of them, once in a human body, cause mayhem. Some of them also transmit well among people, bursting into local outbreaks that may kill hundreds. They are new to science and to human immune systems; they emerge unpredictably and are difficult to treat; and they can be especially dangerous, as reflected in the name of the branch within NCZVED that studied them—Special Pathogens. For these reasons, some scientists and public-health experts, including Ali Khan, find the viruses an irresistible challenge. "It's because they keep you on your toes," he told me. On the second day of my visit, amid the intriguingly gruesome briefings, Khan took me out for sushi.

Khan is a medical doctor by training, an epidemiologist by career, and a man of candid, irreverent jocularity. He was wearing an epauletted uniform sweater; at the time, he was also an officer in the United States Public Health Service, which is organized into ranks, like those in the U.S. Navy. "You've heard all the talk from our people," he said. "Which of these diseases is your favorite?"

My *favorite*? Ebola is pretty damn interesting, I told him.

"Aaah," Khan said dismissively. "I like Ebola as much as the next person." He had done crucial epidemiological work during the 1995 Ebola outbreak in Kikwit, in what was then Zaire, organizing control measures, investigating transmission, tracing the outbreak back to its Patient Zero, risking his life to help end a juggernaut of misery and death. He continued, "But, for my money, SARS was the one."

SARS? I knew of it only as a bad viral disease that, in 2003, came out of southern China and killed people in Toronto, Singapore, and a few other cities. The acronym stands for "severe acute respiratory syndrome." It's an ugly illness that can lead to lethal pneumonia. A little more than eight thousand people were infected, of whom about ten per cent died, and then the outbreak ended. "Why SARS?" I asked.

"Because it was so contagious, and so lethal," he said. "And we were very lucky to stop it." SARS was the bullet that went whistling past humanity's ear. This was on our lunch break, I had stopped taking notes, and it was four-

teen years ago, so I can't swear that Khan mentioned the other thing that is most relevant about SARS: It was caused by a novel coronavirus.

Ali Khan is now the dean of the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, in Omaha. He seems an unlikely Omahan: born and raised in Brooklyn, by Pakistani immigrant parents, he went to Brooklyn College, followed by SUNY Downstate (in Brooklyn) for medical school. "And then I did this crazy thing of leaving Brooklyn"—crazy to his family, "because I have uncles and aunts who have never yet left Brooklyn to go to the city." His father, Gulab Deen Khan, was a self-made man of the epic sort: as a teen-age peasant farmer, he trekked from Kashmir to Bombay, lied about his age, and got work on a ship, greasing engines. His friends called him Dini, as a diminutive, because he was small. After moving to the U.S., Dini Khan stoked coal in boilers to heat apartment buildings in Brooklyn until he had saved enough to buy an apartment building himself. He made money—what seemed a fortune. Before he lost it, in another speculation, Dini Khan decided that his young son, Ali, should learn about his family's culture, religion, and language. He sent Ali back to Pakistan for middle and high school. By parental miscalculation, he chose a classic British boarding school in Lahore, a better place to learn cricket than Urdu or Islam. Ali Khan, now fifty-six years old, told me this story, punctuated with laughs, when I reached him recently by Skype. His dark hair and beard had grayed a bit, but he still looked fit and sounded jovial. He spoke of Omaha like a pitchman for the Chamber of Commerce: great city, safe, unpretentious ethos, full of billionaires, such as Warren Buffett, who live in their old family homes, drive their little Buicks, and write million-dollar checks to the community.

"I *love* being a dean," he said. "It's so much fun." He went to Omaha in 2014, leaving the directorship of the C.D.C.'s Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response, which included overseeing the Strategic National Stockpile of emergency medical supplies, supervising eight hundred employees, helping assemble a national biodefense strategy against pandemic threats, and much else. "The end of my career at C.D.C., I managed a $1.5-billion budget, so it was people and money." He had travelled the world on outbreak responses, from Wyoming to Bangladesh. During a mission to southern Chile, investigating a hantavirus outbreak, he visited remote villages, sometimes on horseback, trapping rodents to determine which species carried the virus. "We learned quickly that there were a lot of rodents," he said. After he worked on Rift Valley fever in Saudi Arabia, in 2001, the Saudi Minister of Health gave him a Lucite replica of a beheading sword as a token of gratitude. At one dicey moment in central Zaire, during an outbreak of monkeypox, he and his team got word that two sets of combatants in the raging civil war—Laurent Kabila's guerrillas and the opposing forces of President Mobutu—were coming. "They'll likely take your vehicles and gear," an American Embassy contact advised by satellite telephone. "But they probably won't kill you." Khan's group packed fast and vamoosed on a small airplane, which rose straight into a thrashing thunderstorm. "The guy on my left was praying," Khan recounted in a book, "The Next Pandemic," full of colorful field adventures and serious warnings, published in 2016. "I looked over and saw that the French physician sitting next to me was writing a farewell note to his family. Which got me thinking." His thought: This is a risky profession, and the work has to be worth a person's life. For more than two decades at the C.D.C., it evidently was. In 1995, he did that hitch in Kikwit, Zaire, for Ebola. The following year, he went to the Sultanate of Oman to help with Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever. Uganda, in 2001, for Ebola again. SARS, in Singapore, in 2003. Chad was still struggling to eliminate polio in 2008, and Khan went there.

But, toward the end of his tenure with the C.D.C., as a high-level bureaucrat, he was responsible for orchestrating, not investigating; science was a small slice of the job. "Now it's almost all science," he said. Virology, epidemiology, ecology, and other aspects of disease science provide the substance of his mission, "educating the next generation of public-health practitioners."

The eclectic décor of his current office includes electron micrographs of various pathogens hung like portraits in a rogues' gallery, two sculptures of mosquitoes as big as crows, a "Star Wars" clock, a "Big Hero 6" toy robot, cards sent from children all over the world, mementos and gifts from his travels—a Congolese incense burner, the Saudi beheading sword—and a whiteboard on which he records what he calls "my metrics." His precious metrics: measures of progress toward academic goals for his school, scientific goals, philanthropic goals to support the work. "I'm evidence-based and evidence-driven," he said.

I asked Khan about COVID-19. What went so disastrously wrong? Where was the public-health preparedness that he had overseen at the C.D.C.? Why were most countries—and especially the U.S.—so unready? Was it a lack of scientific information, or a lack of money?

"This is about lack of imagination," he said.

There were warnings. One of them was Khan's favorite disease, SARS. In late 2002, an "atypical pneumonia" of unknown origin began spreading in and near the city of Guangzhou, in southern China—one of the largest urban agglomerations on the planet. In January, 2003, in the body of a portly seafood merchant suffering a respiratory crisis, the virus reached a Guangzhou hospital. In that hospital, and then at a respiratory facility to which he was transferred, the man coughed, gasped, spewed, and sputtered during his intubation, infecting dozens of health-care workers. He became known among Guangzhou medical staff as the Poison King. In retrospect, disease scientists have applied a different label, calling him a super-spreader.

One infected physician, a nephrologist at the hospital, experienced flu-like symptoms but then, feeling better, took a three-hour bus ride to Hong Kong for his nephew's wedding. Staying in Room 911 of the Metropole Hotel, the doctor became sick again, spreading the disease along the ninth-floor corridor. In the days that followed, other guests on the ninth floor flew home to Singapore and Toronto, taking the disease with them. Several weeks later, the World Health Organization called it SARS. (The Metropole, having become notorious, was later renamed.) By March 15th, the W.H.O. was reporting a hundred and fifty new SARS cases worldwide.

Two mysteries loomed, one urgent

and one haunting: What was the cause—a new virus, and if so what kind?—and from what sort of animal had it come? The first mystery was soon solved by a team led by Malik Peiris, a Sri Lankan doctor who got a degree in microbiology at Oxford before going to the University of Hong Kong. Peiris specialized in influenza, and he suspected that H5N1, a flu virus that is troublesome in birds and often lethal in people but not infectious person-to-person, might have evolved into a form transmissible among humans. His team managed to isolate a new virus from two patients. It was a coronavirus, not a flu bug—that is, it was from a different virus family, with different familial traits. But the mere presence of this new virus in two SARS patients did not mean that it was the cause of the disease. Then Peiris's team showed with antibody testing that it might indeed be the SARS agent, and further work proved that they were right. Although earlier tradition tended toward naming new viruses by geographical association—Ebola was a river, Marburg a city in Germany, Nipah a Malaysian village, Hendra an Australian suburb—greater sensitivity about stigmatization prevailed. The pathogen became known as SARS-CoV. Recently, the name has been revised to SARS-CoV-1, so that the agent of COVID-19 can be called not Wuhan virus but SARS-CoV-2.

SARS reached Toronto on February 23, 2003, carried by a seventy-eight-year-old woman, who, with her husband, had spent several nights of a two-week trip to Hong Kong on the ninth floor of the Metropole Hotel. The woman sickened, then died at home on March 5th, attended by family, including one of her sons, who soon showed symptoms himself. After a week of breathing difficulties, he went to an emergency room and there, without isolation, was given medication through a nebulizer, which turns liquid into mist, pushing it down a patient's throat. "It helps open up your airways," Khan told me—a useful and safe tool to prevent, say, an asthma attack. But, with a highly infectious virus, unwise. "When you breathe that back out, essentially you're taking all the virus in your lungs and you're breathing it back out into the air—in the E.R. where you're being treated." Two other patients in the E.R. were infected, one of whom soon went to a coronary-care unit with a heart attack. There he eventually infected eight nurses, one doctor, three other patients, two clerks, his own wife, and two technicians, among others. You could call him a super-spreader. One E.R. visit led to a hundred and twenty-eight cases among people associated with the hospital. Seventeen of them died.

In Singapore, the first SARS case was a young woman who had also stayed at the Metropole, and had, on March 1st, sought help for fever, cough, and pneumonia at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, one of Singapore's largest facilities. She had visitors, and, when several of them returned as patients, doctors suspected something contagious. Then four nurses from the young woman's ward called in sick on one day, an abnormality noticed by Brenda Ang, a physician who was in charge of infection control at the hospital. "That was the defining moment for me," Ang, a tiny, forthright woman, said, when I visited her at the hospital. "Everything was accelerating." It was Thursday, March 12, 2003, the day that the W.H.O. issued a global alert about this "atypical pneumonia."

At about that time, Ali Khan arrived in Singapore, serving as a W.H.O. consultant (seconded from the C.D.C.) to help organize an investigation and a response. He met daily with Suok-Kai Chew, the chief epidemiologist at the Ministry of Health, and along with others they developed strategy and tactics, getting governmental coöperation through a SARS task force. The public-health strategy was isolation and quarantine. "Before this outbreak, quarantine and isolation were not often evoked for infectious-disease outbreaks," Khan told me—at least, not in the recent past. During the medieval plagues in Europe, infected unfortunates were sometimes sent outside city walls, to die or recover; the Mediterranean seaport Ragusa (now Dubrovnik) established a *trentino*, a thirty-day quarantine for travellers arriving from plague zones. In late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America, during smallpox outbreaks, victims showing pox (especially if they were poor people or people of color) could be confined in quarantine camps, surrounded by high fences of barbed wire, or in nightmarish "pesthouses"—not so much to be treated but for the safety of the general populace. "That was a concept that had sort of gone out of vogue," Khan told me dryly. He and Chew and their colleagues revived it in a more humane version.

Tan Tock Seng started treating only SARS patients, with other sick people diverted to Singapore General. Every suspected or probable case of SARS went into isolation at T.T.S., and the definition of "suspected or probable" was expanded beyond W.H.O. guidelines to include anyone with a fever or respiratory trouble. All health-care workers

"We found a dangling participle in your carburetor, Professor."

suited up with personal protective equipment, including N95 masks, and they were required to check themselves for fever or other symptoms three times a day. Medical staff were also restricted to one institution, so they couldn't carry the virus between hospitals. During risky procedures, such as intubating a patient, they wore respirator helmets that pumped in purified air.

Firm measures were also taken to limit the disease's spread in the community. As of March 27th, schools closed, and the bodies of those who died of SARS were cremated within twenty-four hours. Investigators traced close contacts of each new SARS patient, also within twenty-four hours, and those contacts were consigned to mandatory self-quarantine. "O.K., you are staying home. There will be a camera we're setting up in your house, and there's a phone," Khan said, recounting the instructions. "We will call you randomly, and you're expected to turn on the camera and be there." Already, more than eight hundred people were quarantined. Flout the home quarantine, and you'd be tagged with an electronic tracer, such as an ankle bracelet. Mandatory quarantine brought logistical challenges, Khan told me: " 'The moment you hold 'em, you own 'em,' is what we say." You've got to feed these people, see to their health care, make sure they are housed and clothed. "Who takes care of them? Who pays for them?" If you're the government ministry enforcing self-quarantine, you do.

By April 24th, twenty-two people had died, at which point penalties for quarantine-breakers stiffened: bigger fines, the possibility of jail. Taxi-drivers had their temperature checked daily. Passengers departing and arriving at Changi Airport were also screened, as well as people travelling in buses and private automobiles. On May 20th, eleven people were fined three hundred dollars each for spitting. These measures worked. On July 13, 2003, the last SARS patient walked out of Tan Tock Seng and it was over. Some people loosely say that SARS "burned out," having killed only seven hundred and seventy-four people worldwide. It didn't burn out. As Ali Khan told me, it was stopped.

"What are you most concerned about now?" I asked Brenda Ang, at Tan Tock Seng, six years later.

"Remember, as soon as his boss joins the videoconference, it's showtime."

• •

She laughed in frustration. "Complacency," she said. "And apathy." Mundane but crucial infection-control measures—the assiduous hand washing and wiping of doorknobs with alcohol—can lapse after a crisis. "People become complacent. They think there is no new bugs around." And larger lessons, beyond the outbreak locale, beyond Singapore? "There's no point just protecting your own turf," she said. "Infectious diseases are so globalized."

Ali Khan later told me the same thing: "A disease anywhere is a disease everywhere."

In 2015, a different coronavirus arrived in South Korea, in the body of a sixty-eight-year-old man returning from business on the Arabian Peninsula. Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS) had been recognized as a disease three years earlier, and nicknamed camel flu, because dromedary camels seem to carry the virus and transmit it to people. The MERS virus may have originally come from bats—the Egyptian tomb bat, perhaps—but has probably been circulating in camels for at least thirty years. It may have spilled over into humans earlier than 2012, but, if so, those infections went unnoticed. No one knows whether the Korean businessman was sneezed on by a camel sometime during his stops in Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, or whether he picked up his infection from a person, but that question probably mattered little to the hundred and eighty-six South Koreans who became infected from him, directly or indirectly, and still less to the thirty-eight who died.

Super-spreader events drove this outbreak, too, but it was exacerbated by aspects of South Korea's health-care system. Because citizens receive cheap medical care through a national insurance plan, with few restrictions on which hospital they visit, people often shop for treatment. The businessman visited three different hospitals after he felt sick, and was finally admitted to a fourth,

"Oh, my God, it feels good to lie down."

• •

in Seoul, where he was given a diagnosis of MERS. By that time, he had infected twenty-nine people, of whom two became super-spreaders themselves, accounting for ninety-seven more cases. There were sometimes four or more beds in a hospital room, and patients were allowed to receive visitors, which contributed to the spread, as did poor ventilation, poor infection control, and narrow criteria for quarantine, so that people who picked up the infection through casual contact were missed. "They recognized at that point what happens with a coronavirus that causes health-care-acquired infections within your community and hopscotches from hospital to hospital," Khan said. MERS in South Korea became a textbook example of blunders that led to "nosocomial spread," the term for health-care-acquired infections. When COVID-19 arrived, Khan said, "I guess maybe it was raw for them."

SARS touched the U.S. only gently, producing twenty-seven probable cases and no deaths, most likely for reasons amounting to luck. MERS seemed even less notable: two cases in 2014, both in health-care workers returning from stints in Saudi Arabia, with no secondary spread. The C.D.C. noticed, but scarcely anyone else did.

Other warnings came from scientists. In a series of obscure but important papers published in the past fifteen years—most with the word "bat" in the title and often with the name Zheng-Li Shi in the list of authors—researchers illuminated the connections among coronaviruses, bats, and people.

Zheng-Li Shi is a virologist in her fifties, educated in Wuhan and France, who runs a lab at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. She made her first bat-catching expedition into Chinese caves in 2004, and a year later helped lead a group of researchers who showed that the SARS virus, discovered by Peiris to cause the syndrome in people, came to humans from bats. Before that, there had been a false lead pointing toward the masked palm civet—a wild carnivore, roughly resembling a badger, that is prized in the wild-animal food trade—and thousands of captive civets were promptly slaughtered. Then better data came from Shi's group. In 2013, she co-wrote a paper casting light on how some bat-borne coronaviruses—but not others—succeed in infecting humans. Their spike proteins (the knobby projections that give each viral particle its corona-like appearance) bind well to receptors not just on bat cells but on certain cells in the human respiratory tract. It's sort of a hook-and-latch relationship, and the latches, known as ACE-2 receptors, allow viral penetration of the cell. Once inside, the viral genome commandeers some of the cell's apparatus to make copies of itself, and the infection takes off.

Around that time, Shi and her team began focussing on a cave on the outskirts of Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province, in an area famous for its picturesque karst formations. Sampling bodily fluids from bats that used the cave as a roost, the researchers found a great diversity of coronaviruses, including three carrying just the right equipment—spike proteins capable of seizing ACE-2 receptors—for infecting humans. "This work," they warned in a 2017 paper, "highlights the necessity of preparedness for future emergence of SARS-like diseases." One strain of coronavirus they found, in a horseshoe bat, later took the label RaTG13 (not an acronym but a code of convenience). It's worth casting an eye on that ungainly label, because RaTG13 is the closest known relative of what we now call SARS-CoV-2, with a 96.2-per-cent genome similarity, which, as coronaviruses go, makes it like a first cousin.

One of Shi's co-authors on that paper was a longtime collaborator of hers named Peter Daszak, who is the president of

EcoHealth Alliance, a nonprofit scientific group, based in New York, devoted to biological conservation and pandemic prevention. Daszak praises Shi for her tireless scientific diligence, the solidity of her lab work, and more. "I've been in the field with her, I've done karaoke with her," he told me. "She's the No. 1 singer at the Wuhan Institute of Virology."

Shi and Daszak and their colleagues not only warned the world, three years ago, that a new SARS-like disease was possible. They held up for inspection, as though with a pair of tongs, a close variant of the virus that would cause the COVID-19 pandemic. (Questions were recently raised in the Washington *Post* about the possibility that a virus grown in Shi's lab might have escaped containment, seeding the Wuhan outbreak, but so far there's no scientific evidence for that and considerable evidence against it.) Furthermore, they added, it wasn't just one virus that we needed to be wary of, since various SARS-like viruses capable of using the ACE-2 receptor "are still circulating among bats in this region."

The new virus revealed itself gradually in humans last December, in Wuhan, and in January several Chinese laboratories, Shi's among them, sequenced wholly or partly the genomes of samples from different patients, including five complete genomes. Shi and her colleagues made their announcement, on January 23rd, that the virus found in those five patients was 96.2-per-cent identical to the bat coronavirus they had warned about three years earlier. By that time, the virus had been circulating in Wuhan for at least seven weeks, and three consequential misconceptions had been propagated, not just by political leaders but by hospital officials and the Chinese version of the C.D.C.: that the outbreak had begun in the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, which famously sold much more than seafood; that the virus wasn't dangerous; and that it didn't pass from person to person. On the second and third points, there was disagreement by clinicians treating patients, such as Zhang Li, at Wuhan's Jinyintan Hospital, who told the *Wall Street Journal* in late February, "I was on alert because this was a new pneumonia and because I'd dealt with SARS."

The misconception that the market was the origin of the outbreak is implicitly contradicted by a scientific paper published in late January, by a group of physicians from Wuhan and Beijing, describing clinical features of the first forty-one patients. Twenty-seven of them, the paper said, had been exposed in the Huanan market. Since a single horseshoe bat would be unlikely to infect twenty-seven people, even if they diced it into hors d'œuvres, and since by some accounts bats weren't even on sale in the market at that time, a few scientists have speculated that there was an intermediate host animal—a snake, a pangolin, a palm civet?—in which the virus amplified itself, before that larger creature was sold or butchered. The molecular evidence for snakes is weak, pangolins are a complicated story, and civets aren't implicated this time. An American physician and scholar named Daniel R. Lucey (who had also worked the SARS outbreak, in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Toronto) wondered about the fourteen other early patients. He noticed that the first of them, falling sick on December 1st, had no direct or secondary contact with the market. That meant, given the incubation period, that the virus must have been circulating in Wuhan outside the market since November. This doesn't controvert the likelihood of the virus originating in a bat, but it suggests that perhaps it went *into* the Huanan market, as well as coming out of it, in humans. SARS-CoV-2 is a subtle bug.

Singapore, with SARS vivid in memory, reacted quickly and firmly to COVID-19, closing the border to nonresidents, putting to use the isolation hospitals and negative-pressure rooms built

since 2003, testing abundantly, tracing contacts and consigning them to home quarantine, and integrating political and health leadership to produce lucid, honest, consistent messaging. Despite all this, the country was not in lockdown until early April, when numbers shifted abruptly and a second wave struck.

South Korea, likewise, has used extensive testing, isolation, and quarantines to keep its caseload low. Although the capital, Seoul, is less than three hours from Wuhan by air, South Korea has had fewer cases and deaths than Sweden or Peru. Of course, that could change fast.

"South Korea is a good example for us to look at," Khan told me. The first South Korean case was confirmed on January 20th, the same day as the first confirmed U.S. case. "They took a very different approach, and all we had to do was look at what they were doing and say, 'We're going to do the same thing.' But we did not." The first genome sequence of the virus from a human became available, from China, on January 10th. South Korean officials, after confirming their initial case, met promptly with medical-supply companies and urged them to develop test kits and start mass production. Scientists in the U.S. soon had their own sequenced samples, but time passed without meaningful action. "Every day after January 22nd was a day missed—by the U.S. government," Khan told me. We could have called in Becton Dickinson (a giant medical-technology company) and told its leaders that we wanted nationwide testing capacity by the following Monday, he said. We didn't. Why? Lack of imagination. Scientists could describe the risks, public-health officials could chart a response, but agency bureaucrats and national leadership failed to comprehend how bad the outbreak could be. On March 30th Donald Trump said, "Nobody had any idea."

The first reported U.S. case involved a thirty-five-year-old man who had visited relatives in Wuhan before returning to the Seattle area on January 15th. (Lately, the news has broken of two other early cases, in Santa Clara County, California, that suggest the virus may have been present in the U.S. before January 15th; both patients died in February, but their COVID-positive status was only detected, from autopsy evidence, in late April.) The Seattle-area man turned up at an urgent-care clinic on January 19th with complaints of a persistent cough and fever. His cough represented SARS-CoV-2's most obvious means of dispersing to other hosts, and so, for at least four days, this man could have passed the infection to others in Snohomish County,

adjacent to Seattle, and possibly also on the airplane (if he was shedding virus though not yet symptomatic). At the clinic, his travel history raised concern, so an urgent-care provider notified personnel at the state health department, who notified the C.D.C.'s Emergency Operations Center. Get samples and we'll test him, the C.D.C. said. The man gave blood and swab samples, then went home. The next day, when his test results were positive, he was admitted to a hospital and placed in an isolation unit.

The disastrously tardy, inadequate, confused, and (for many citizens) confusing response of the federal government to COVID-19, both before and after the first case, derives from too many factors to list here, but I'll mention two: failure to appreciate the SARS and MERS warnings, both delivered by other coronaviruses; and loss of capacity at high government levels, within recent years, to understand the gravity and immediacy of pandemic threats. The result of that loss is what Ali Khan means by lack of imagination. Beth Cameron, a former head of the Directorate for Global Health Security and Biodefense on the National Security Council staff, calls it the absence of "the smoke alarm." Those in power who are charged with "keeping watch to get ahead of emergencies" need to smell the smoke and smother the fire while it's small, Cameron told me. "You're not going to stop outbreaks from happening. But you can stop outbreaks from becoming epidemics or pandemics." She led the directorate from its establishment, following the 2014 Ebola epidemic in West Africa, until March, 2017. It survived under her successor for a little more than a year, and then, after John Bolton became the national-security adviser, it was dissolved. A smoke alarm doesn't work when the battery has been removed.

Dennis Carroll, a former research virologist, led a pandemic-threats unit at the U.S. Agency for International Development for almost fifteen years. In 2009, he created a large program called PREDICT, dispersing about two hundred million dollars in grants to support discovery of potentially dangerous new viruses before they spill over into humans. That program is ending, due to "the ascension of risk averse bureaucrats," he told the *Times*, last October. He mentioned the White House closure of the N.S.C. health directorate as a parallel instance, and said that both Congress and the Administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama were "enormously supportive," but then came the current chill winds.

The U.S. is not alone. "The global community has a really difficult time investing in what you think of as risk," Carroll told me recently. Spending big money is itself a form of risk, especially if it's public money, even if you're spending it to insure against a greater risk. What if you spend a billion dollars, or ten billion—small change compared with what COVID-19 is now costing—and the pandemic doesn't occur during your term in office? "There's very little appetite for that when the threat isn't clear and present," Carroll said. When SARS happens, when a swine-flu pandemic happens, when an Ebola epidemic happens, political leaders and private donors react with fretful largesse, but when the crisis ends, he said, "we see a total collapse of those kinds of investments." Homeowners buy fire insurance, governments buy vast armories of weaponry hoping they won't be used, but there's reluctance to invest seriously in preparedness against pandemics. "It's attention-deficit disorder on a global scale," Carroll said.

At the end of "The Next Pandemic," Ali Khan offered another metaphor: "The time has come for us to move beyond seeing public health as the ax in the display case, where the sign says IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, BREAK GLASS." We need investment in preventive measures, he wrote, to make our communities resilient against such a nightmare—and that means viral discovery in the field; vigilant monitoring for spillovers; systems to produce diagnostic tests fast and in great abundance; better surge capacity of health-care providers; smart supply chains for P.P.E. and ventilators, and coördinated plans for moving them from one jurisdiction to another; coördinated planning among cities, states, provinces, nations, and international agencies for containing infectious disaster; public education to stiffen willingness to endure social distancing and quarantine monitoring; better public-health leadership and reliable funding cycles; and, most critically, the political will to risk paying for preparedness that might not be needed.

Maybe we will have those for the next pandemic, but it's too late for vigilant preparedness against this one. "Usually, my personal role is to respond to these outbreaks overseas," Khan told me the last time we Skyped. Such missions have spanned his C.D.C. career and beyond. But this time he hasn't travelled. "There's more than enough work right here in America," he said. He might spend part of a day on decisions about fall classes and budget shortfalls at the College of Public Health, working to move convocation online, consulting with state or local officials about public-health measures or with private companies about keeping their employees and customers safe. When fifty-seven Americans who had been evacuated from Wuhan landed at the Omaha airport, in early February, Khan helped arrange for their quarantine at Camp Ashland, a National Guard base along the Platte River. He does media interviews, oversees the faculty deploying student teams for contact tracing in Nebraska and Iowa, advises on improvements to meat-packing facilities, and serves on the steering committee of the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, a linkage of experts working under the W.H.O. to study, anticipate, and respond to disease events. Like most of us now, he spends much of his time on Skype, Zoom, and the telephone, but for him the substance of discussions runs to drug-trials research, immune response, the latest in disease modelling, and how best to decontaminate N95 masks.

The case count for Nebraska is rising, from one confirmed patient, on March 6th, into the thousands. The state ranks low in cases and deaths, but also low in testing, so the real number of infected Nebraskans is unknown. Governor Pete Ricketts has closed schools, forbidden gatherings of more than ten people in some counties, and declared a state of emergency, but has declined to issue a stay-at-home order. Omaha is the county seat of Douglas County, the state's most populous, which has its busiest airport and has been hit with a significant number of cases. And so, as Ali Khan sits in his office, amid pictures and mementos from a life of charging to the front against infectious disease, the pandemic is coming to him. ♦

QUARANTINE STEW

BY ETHAN KUPERBERG

There's nothing quite as meditative as cooking—it might be the only thing keeping me sane right now! This hearty stew serves five, which is perfect for my current household: me, my cat, my two porcelain dolls that have begun speaking to me, and my porcelain doll that is currently not speaking to me owing to a misunderstanding.

PREP TIME:
30 min, or a few days—what's the difference?

INGREDIENTS:
- 3 bottles red wine
- 1 pound beef (you may substitute ice cream)
- 6 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 7 teaspoons vegetable oil if you're feeling naughty
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 Lexapro tablets (crushed)
- 3 1/2 cups beef broth (you may substitute ice cream)
- Some carrots and onions or whatever. It doesn't matter.

PREPARATION:
- Wash the onions to make sure they're clean. Everything must be clean! Scrub them vigorously under scalding hot water with Lysol or bleach.
- Drink first bottle of red wine.
- Place the beef (or ice cream) in a large pot. Turn the news on, see a headline, then immediately turn the news off. You don't need that right now!
- Cook the beef until it is browned on all sides. While doing this, sing Stephen Sondheim's "Send in the Clowns" to yourself, loudly. Puzzle over why you're only realizing now, once you're in quarantine, that you could have pursued singing professionally. Isn't that rich?
- Slice the onions and add them to the pot. Wait, these aren't onions, they're apples. Have they been apples this whole time? Is there that big of a difference between an apple and an onion, anyway?
- Slice the apples and add them to the pot.
- Call your parents and tell them that you are a chef now. Let them know that they should call you Chef, because that is your new name. Learn that your parents left the house today to deposit a check at the bank, even though they are both over sixty. Yell at them until you are all sobbing, then hang up the phone.
- Simmer.
- Add cilantro to the pot. To you, cilantro tastes like soap. But who cares? It's the end of the world. Hey, add some real soap, too!
- Take everything else that is still in your produce drawer and throw it into the air. Whatever lands in your stew is now part of your stew! Life is random and cruel; so, too, your stew shall be!
- Reduce heat and drink fourth bottle of red wine.
- Feel offended that your cat is mocking your cooking abilities. Tell your cat that you're under a lot of pressure right now, and she's not going to get any stew if she calls you a philistine again. It's hurtful.
- Almost forgot the bay leaves. Add them—to your mouth! They taste very weird. Eat the rest of the bay leaves in your pantry, and also the paprika.
- Receive text message from your parents about your fight from three days ago. Hold on, how long have you been cooking this stew for?
- Almost done! Cover pot for ten minutes, or until you feel like taking the lid off and wearing it as a hat. Ouch, your new hat feels extremely hot on your head!
- Ladle stew among five bowls while calling your parents back and telling them that you love them, to taste.

Buon appetito! Your stew is all done. Put some clothes on and enjoy! ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

PERSONAL HISTORY

MISSED CALLS

Long-distance love, death, and grief.

BY LAUREN COLLINS

Lauren Collins and her father, John Collins, in North Carolina in the fall of 1980.

COURTESY WILLIAM J. BONEY, JR.

Father Michael, a priest my family has never met, in a city we never identified, gave my father a version of the last rites over the telephone on the night of April 4th. My father, John Collins, had received a diagnosis of acute myeloid leukemia in January. After spending nearly two months undergoing chemotherapy at Duke University Medical Center, in Durham, North Carolina, he was finally discharged from the hospital in mid-March, just as the coronavirus pandemic broke out. He and my mother, Sue, returned to their home in Wilmington. Everyone was scrambling. There were cancelled appointments, appointments rescheduled for Zoom; Zoom appointments cancelled, too, when my father's new, outpatient doctors, having determined that it was too risky for him to continue commuting to Durham, acknowledged that they couldn't very well devise a treatment plan without being able to physically examine him.

The coronavirus may have accelerated his decline, or it may not have. Leukemia was the disease at fault. Still, the demands on medical personnel, amid the general chaos, made recovering at home dangerous and dying at home unworkable. On the afternoon of April 3rd, my father entered a hospice center. He had not been a churchgoer in recent years, and hadn't attended a Catholic church since adolescence. Still, we knew that last rites were something he wanted, so we tried hard to make it happen. In the course of the evening and the next day, my mother called "a zillion friends" to try to rustle up a Catholic officiant. No one local would come. Her friend's sister-in-law's acquaintance finally found a willing Father Michael somewhere in California. "Just heard from one priest who does not know how to do FaceTime," the friend's sister-in-law texted. "He's now checking with another priest. If he's tech savvy, he can do all except the anointing."

I learned about this when I woke up in Paris on April 5th and checked my WhatsApp messages. "Sorry you missed it, but had to take the call when he rang," my mother had written, referring to the priest, at 2:39 A.M. I should have had my ringer on. I had also missed a video call at 6:11, and one at 6:13. I called my mother at 6:19, and she told me that my father had died. It took me a few minutes to switch on the light in my bedroom, during which time I appeared to my mother in the form of a pitch-black rectangle. She asked if I wanted to see him, and, not really knowing whether I did, I said yes. First, she aimed the camera at the door ("Mom, that's the door"), and then she turned it toward the bed, where my father's body lay. The bad lighting and the slow connection produced greenish, unfiltered alloys of pixel and flesh.

Despite having lived abroad for a decade, I'd always thought of FaceTime as a weak substitute for first-order interaction, whether in person or in writing. Like Diet Coke, it was to be avoided except when there were no other decent options. Better to have the real thing, less frequently, than to settle for constant interruptions and glitches. Video calls are unsatisfying not just because of the lack of touch but because they require mutual active presence. Conversation is only a part of companionship. It's hard to just *be* when you're on a call, hard to see when you're constantly looking.

Because of the coronavirus, I was quarantined in France. When we'd last

pushed for a prognosis, in early March, my father's doctors had guessed that he had somewhere between a year and eighteen months left to live. I had a ticket home for March 19th, but, after the pandemic hit, we decided to postpone the visit. Soon, though, it became clear that my father's condition was deteriorating. The doctors could see it in his blood-cell counts, but I understood that he was dying when, one afternoon, my kids demanded that he do the Funky Chicken, as he often did for them on FaceTime. After a knockout performance—elbows flapping, knees knocking, bent low enough that he could reach down and slap the floor—he collapsed back into his deck chair, and said that he needed to sleep.

I tried to find a way to join him, my mother, and my brother, who lives in Wilmington with his wife and young children. One flight a day was still operating from Paris to the United States. On April 4th, it was headed to Los Angeles. On the fifth, it was going to J.F.K., landing in New York in the late afternoon. To get to Wilmington, I would then either rent a car and drive ten hours or spend the night in a hotel, take a taxi to LaGuardia the next morning, and catch two more flights. In the end, these were fantasy itineraries, dark mirrors of the vacations that people have passed the pandemic imagining in extravagant detail, as a way to transcend confinement and the powerlessness that comes with it. Even if I made it home in time to see my father, I might transmit the coronavirus to my mother, who is seventy, or to other people. I might get stranded, or sick myself, in a country where I don't have health insurance. Staying in Paris went against all my instincts, but going seemed foolhardy.

The hospice was in lockdown, but it allowed immediate family members to visit at the end of life. A mercy, and a privilege: my father wouldn't die alone. On his last afternoon, my mother and brother sat at his bedside, occasionally putting an iPhone close to his right ear, the good one, so that I could talk to him. This was a warm moment, the best simulacrum of togetherness that we could create. But it was also distressing for me, because my father wasn't responding, and my mother and brother couldn't tell when I was done trying to communicate. I listened while Dad gasped for breath, waiting for someone to reclaim the phone. The ethics of attending to the dying by device are still being written. Do you mute something like that if you can?

The screen, as screens do, kept framing little pictures—grainy grotesques that I wished I could unsee. Still, I eventually took a screenshot, because I was worried about forgetting all the things that, not being there, I hadn't had a chance to internalize. It showed my dad, his mouth bruised and bleeding a little, dressed in a weirdly pretty white gown with a dark-blue motif that reminded me of chrysanthemums. He was lying in a bed with handles. Three electrical outlets, one of them red, were visible above his head. The image kept popping up in my camera roll every time I tried to send a message or post something. I wanted to delete it, but that felt like another kind of desecration. I ended up e-mailing it to myself, just to get it off my phone, and putting it in an unnamed folder.

As I spoke to my mother on the morning of the fifth, a nurse came into the room to tell her that my father's possessions—white socks, a phone charger—would be returned to her. The nurse also presented her with a list of undertakers. I listened in, looking, again, at some random door. "They're awesome, they did my dad," the nurse's disembodied voice said, of one mortuary. Unable to see her face, I couldn't decide what to make of that, so, tuning out, I wandered onto WhatsApp. In the space of three thumb scrolls, my conversations with my dad had gone from "I will stand, this will pass and we will embrace again before you know it" to "I hit my head—so I am in the / JWejhosp." The final screen showed two pictures I had sent him of my kids, marked "seen" by pairs of blue checks.

For many years, Dad wrote me letters. He was a criminal-defense lawyer, and they invariably came on his office letterhead, written in black ink and posted in a business envelope with an American-flag stamp. He had beautiful, surprising handwriting that, with its geometric strokes and irregular vowels (he used uppercase and lowercase "E"s interchangeably, varying their size to signal capitalization), seemed to hint at a bohemian sensibility that he never explored in life. At some point, I stopped responding to his letters, insisting that the mail was inefficient. He was uninterested in, and even hostile to, technology. He liked physical things: one client, a commercial fisherman, used to pay him in grouper and shrimp. Until very recently, my father didn't own a cell phone, and, even once he did, he rarely had it with him. This hurt me, because I thought that, in rejecting e-mailing and texting and all the other things that humans have created to facilitate communication at a distance, he was rejecting me.

The morning of his death, after I hung up with my mother, I typed his name into the search bar in my Gmail. Twenty-two messages came up, more than I'd expected. All of them were written between 2009 and 2011. I'd set up an account for him as a Christmas present, writing, "Give this a try, if you can stand it? There are so many things I'd love to share with you that just fall through the cracks, for lack of anywhere to send them." This was sort of like buying my dad a gift certificate to a restaurant that served food he hated and then inviting him out to dinner. But, for a while, he gave it a shot. In person, we had a game where we liked to say Camilla Parker Bowles's name with the emphasis on different syllables: Camilla *Par*-ker Bowles, Ca-*mill*-a Parker Bowles, Camilla Parker *Bowles*. Once, I sent him a link to a *Daily Mail* article about how she had broken her leg by stumbling into a rabbit hole while hill walking in Scotland. "It is a bit worrisome!" he wrote. "However, most rabbits live in a shallow hill called a form. Shrubs, leaves, grasses, or weeds hide the BOWL-shaped form from sight. So this misadventure may have been predestined by our beloved duchess's last name. Cheerio."

My father knew every state nickname, team mascot, and national capital, and passed that knowledge on to his children, along with a slew of what he proudly acknowledged were useless facts. One of his e-mails to me expressed delight at the existence of

Eyjafjallajökull, the Icelandic volcano that was, at the time, covering much of northern Europe in an ash cloud. An alnager, he wanted me to know, was a person whose job it was to inspect and certify woollens.

Social distancing would, I knew, preclude a traditional funeral. I was desperate to share something of my dad, to try to make it so that he didn't disappear through a trapdoor of global disorder. I went on Twitter and posted a picture of him giving a speech at my wedding, along with one of my husband and me looking back at him. Because my father didn't have the cloud to do his remembering for him, he saved things. In the picture, he's holding a laminated piece of loose-leaf paper: a poem that he'd dug up, written by me in the first grade, declaring that I wanted to travel the world and see "all the countries, Romania, Greece, and all."

On Twitter, I wrote that for decades he had carried in his pocket a lucky purple rock I'd given him; that he'd recorded every species of bird he ever saw, beginning with a red-winged blackbird at Alley Pond Park, in Queens, when he was fourteen; that he'd stopped drinking at the age of sixty-nine. These were some of the things that, under normal circumstances, I would like to have said in front of a packed church. I didn't have enough space to explain that, in one of the e-mails I'd retrieved, he talked about how much he loved his work, quoting the passage in "The Catcher in the Rye" in which Holden Caulfield pledges to "catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff." He had written, "I am the Catcher in the Rye for my clients; I hope."

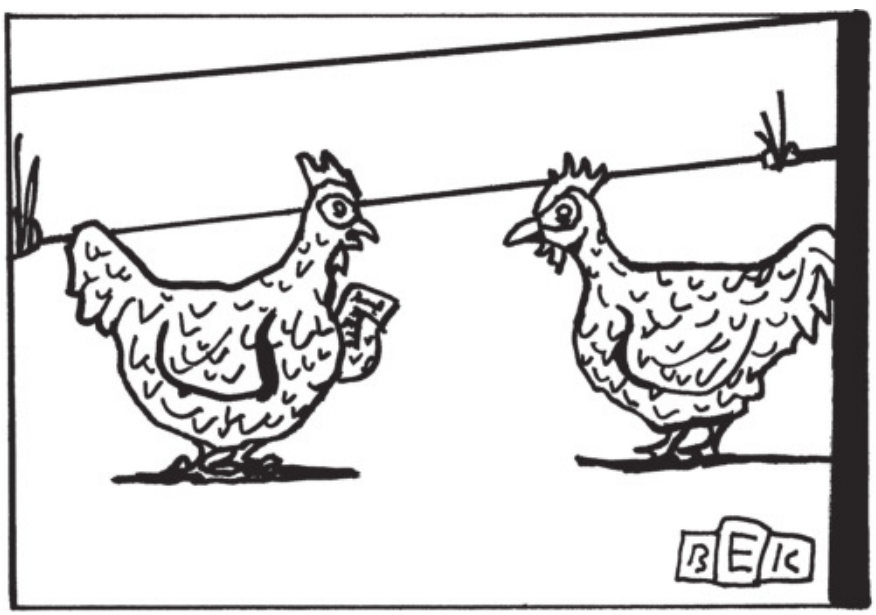
Hundreds of kind people replied—friends, professional acquaintances, complete strangers. A John Collins in Nottingham, England, wrote, "For obvious reasons, this tweet stopped me in my tracks when I saw it today. I'm really sorry to hear of your loss." A reporter from the *Times* offered her condolences, adding a link to a story she'd written about the transformation of mourning during the pandemic. "We may be about to confront death on a scale few of us have ever known, while being stripped of time-honored consolations: wakes, funerals, shivas," it read. "When the hour calls for togetherness, we will be apart." It felt strange knowing that my family and I were now members of a "vanguard" that we'd never aspired to join, reinventing grief in an era of enforced isolation. An article in *Le Monde* about the phenomenon quoted Émile Durkheim saying that "any communion of consciousness, in whatever form it takes place, enhances social vitality." That seemed positive, plus we'd decided that, in our new role as bereavement disrupters, we could dispense with the hearse and, for that matter, an officiant.

I remembered how tenderly my father spoke at his own mother's funeral Mass, describing her in a shirtwaist dress, greeting him when he came home from school. The Church rituals had left my brother, more familiar with cremation than with Catholicism, puzzled. "Is that Grandma?" he'd asked, as the priest walked down the aisle swinging a thurible. My mother was sad that she wouldn't get to meet all the strangers—people from the courthouse, people he'd got out of jail—who had been a part of my father's life. She and my brother buried him on Good Friday, just the two of them and the awesome undertaker. I put on a silk blouse and dialled in with my husband. My sister-in-law didn't go, because they couldn't get a babysitter.

Diseases don't have personalities—my father's leukemia wasn't any more "aggressive" than it was quietly efficient—but, if they did, the coronavirus would be a bureaucrat. It is not an equalizer, as we've seen from the obscene rates of infection and death among African-Americans; nor is it a unifier, as we've seen from David Geffen's drone selfie of his yacht. The pandemic is capricious. Even if it doesn't kill you, it can wield power over your life in a range of ways, from bankrupting you to making you gain five pounds. It isn't above the petty insult, and it doesn't care about your special case.

Parents die every day, and often their children don't get to be there with them. It's a fluke that I ended up watching my father die on FaceTime, whereas it's policy that millions of people who don't have the money or the right passport are forced to be separated from their loved ones for years, or even lifetimes. Some of the free-floating grief that the coronavirus has unleashed among the otherwise rich, safe, and secure is actually grievance: the computer's saying no, the universe won't make an exception no matter what you try.

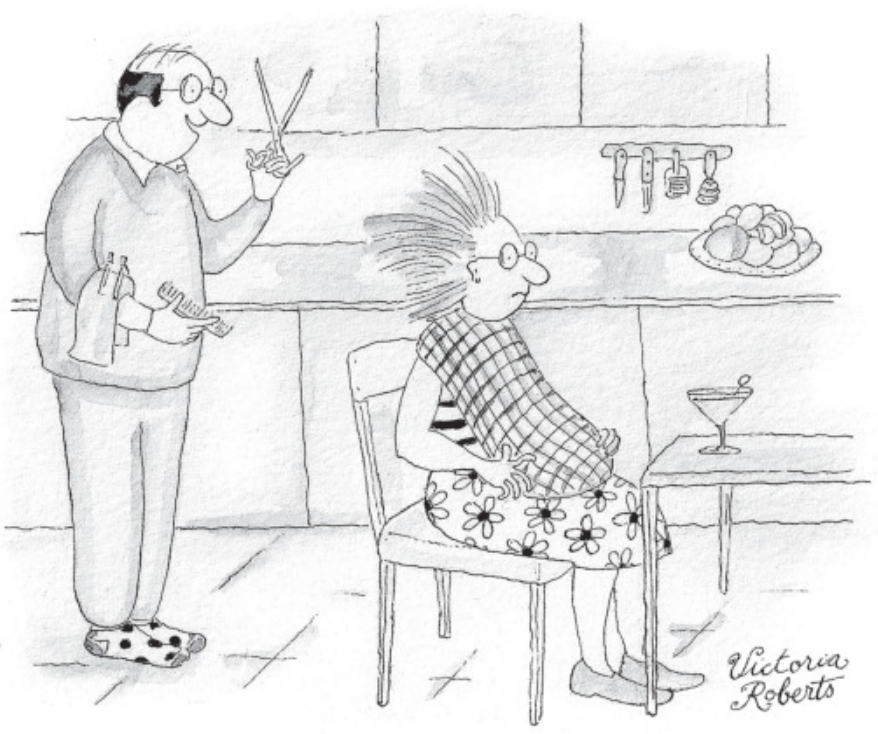
I worry about my mother, drawing comfort from the potted plants that friends are leaving on her porch—Mexican heather; rosemary, for re-



"The invitation says casual smelly feathers."

membrance. She went from living with her parents and eight siblings to a college dormitory, and then directly into marriage. For the first time in her life, she's alone, in a house full of orchids. My father is buried in a cemetery in their neighborhood. When I was a kid, we rode bikes there, bringing plastic sleeves full of sweating bread to feed to the ducks, stuffing our pockets with feathers and with artificial flowers that had blown off the gravestones. My mother has been walking over to the cemetery in the afternoons to "say hi" to Dad. A few days after the burial, as she approached, she saw an unfamiliar man standing near my father's grave. By the time she reached it, he had got back in his car. She introduced herself through the open window. The man, seeming uncomfortable, didn't give his name, saying only that my father had known and helped his kids. He drove off before my mother could learn more. But, by being there, alone and presumed unseen, he made our family feel that my father might have had a proper sendoff in ways that we haven't yet fathomed.

My father's death was complicated by the coronavirus, not caused by it. Losing someone you love in the midst of a pandemic that has taken more than two hundred thousand lives is a great lesson in proportion. In a way, mourning under quarantine has a sense to it. Pain is cruel because it doesn't stop the world from turning, but, for now, the world has stopped turning, relative to its usual pace. I have quiet in which to remember my father, at a moment when the mention of death isn't going to upset anyone's dinner party. My friends and family have the time to send their stories ("Remember when he accidentally cut into my wedding cake?"), their impressions ("Your Dad was like the American you hope to meet before you come to America"), their photos ("Mr. Collins—Karaoke.jpeg"). My husband, Olivier, showed me a twenty-third e-mail. My father had sent it to him, nearly a decade ago, when we had briefly broken up. "Olivier, I am sorry for the recent troubles in your and Lauren's lives," he had written. "You are a wonderful man in your own right. You are a wonderful man as Lauren's companion. I hope after frank discussion you will be able to renew your lives together with fresh visions and goals."



"Trust me, Margherite—I'm an architect."

• •

The most unexpected thing for me about my father's death, in a turbulent moment and at a great remove, is that he has never seemed more alive. Through the eyes of others, I see him so clearly. I realize how courageous he was, how vivacious—a word that's almost never used to describe a man, but which seems, better than any other, to capture how he smiled his way through brutal sickness, leaving it all on the dance floor until the very last. My father had a susceptible streak, was hopeless with money, struggled with alcohol. Had he not married someone who had none of those traits, and then channelled his energy into strict routines of work and family, he could have ended up with a very different life. What I long took for apathy in his lack of a need to communicate I now understand as something closer to contentment—the acquiescence of a man who was deeply happy that everything turned out basically all right.

On the afternoon of the day my father died, I did what I had planned to do anyway, which was to bake a chocolate cake for the staff of Robert Debré Hospital, in the Nineteenth Arrondissement. I had to take it to a neighborhood drop-off point, so I located my socks and shoes, put on a mask, and printed out an attestation saying that I was going out for a legitimate purpose. When I opened the door to my apartment, there was a parcel, wrapped in newsprint, sitting on the doormat. A friend had braved the lockdown to deliver it.

I opened it up and found a letter, accompanied by objects of succor that she had been able to gather from around her apartment: four amaretti, a bunch of dried daisies, and a taper candle, blue like the sky. A week earlier, my parents had received a check from their insurance company, a payment on a cancer policy. My dad had said that he wanted to use it to fly to Paris, "first class." I lit the candle that night and tried to make that trip come true for him. My friend had written, "We are left to face this with what we have: our hearts, beating sadness and love, and our imaginations, this underused magical power." ♦

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

THE GREENWICH REBELLION

How country-club Republicans learned to ignore their neighbors and love Trump.

BY EVAN OSNOS

Prescott Bush, the father and grandfather of future Presidents, was the eight-time club champion on the golf course at the Round Hill Club, one of eight country clubs in Greenwich, Connecticut. Bush was a staunch believer in standards; he required his sons to wear a jacket and tie for dinner at home. He was tall, restrained, and prone to righteousness; friends called him a "Ten Commandments man." In the locker room at Round Hill, someone once told an off-color joke in front of his fourteen-year-old son, George H. W. Bush, and Prescott stormed out, saying, "I don't ever want to hear that kind of language in here again."

In Greenwich, which had an unusually high number of powerful citizens, even by the standards of New York suburbs, Prescott Bush cast a large shadow; he was an investment banker, the moderator of the town council, and, from 1952 to 1963, a United States senator. In Washington, he was President Eisenhower's golf partner, and the embodiment of what Ike called "modern Republicanism." Prescott wanted government lean and efficient, but, like Nelson Rockefeller, the New York governor whose centrism inspired the label Rockefeller Republican, he was more liberal than his party on civil rights, birth control, and welfare. He denounced his fellow-Republican Joseph McCarthy for creating "dangerous divisions among the American people" and for demanding that Congress follow him "blindly, not daring to express any doubts or disagreements." Bush could be ludicrously aristocratic—he had his grandchildren call him Senator—but he believed, fundamentally, in the duty of government to help people who did not enjoy his considerable advantages. He supported increasing the federal minimum wage and immigration quotas, and he beseeched fellow-senators, for the sake of science, education, and defense, to "have the courage to raise the required revenues by approving whatever levels of taxation may be necessary."

Long after Bush died, in 1972, his family stayed central to the community of Greenwich Republicans. His son Prescott, Jr., known as Pressy, served as the chairman of the Republican Town Committee; alumni of the Bush Administrations still live around town. Each year, the highest honor bestowed by the Connecticut Republican Party is the Prescott Bush Award.

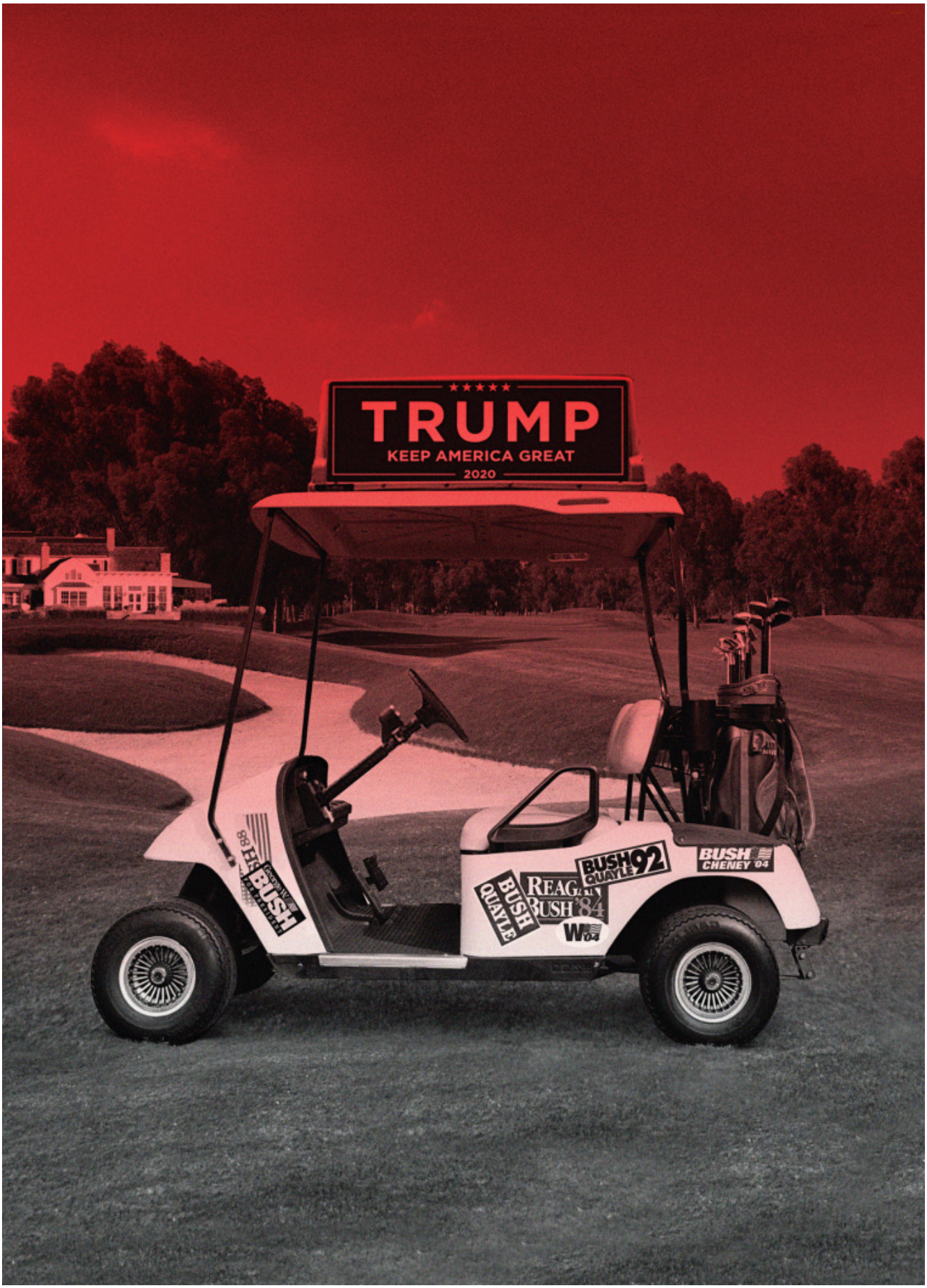
When Donald Trump ran for President, he was hardly a natural heir to the Greenwich Republican tradition. In the eighties, he bought a mansion on the town's waterfront, but he did not often observe the prim Yankee ethic inscribed on the Greenwich coat of arms: *fortitudine et frugalitate*—courage and thrift. Locals were embarrassed by the house's gilded décor, and, after he and his wife Ivana divorced, she sold it. When George H. W. Bush called for a "kinder, gentler nation," Trump responded, "If this country gets any kinder or gentler, it's literally going to cease to exist." In early 2016, even before Trump was asserting his right to "locker-room talk," he was denounced in Greenwich *Time*, the town's daily newspaper, by Leora Levy, a prominent local fund-raiser. "He is vulgar, ill-mannered and disparages those whom he cannot intimidate," she wrote. Levy—the latest winner of the Prescott Bush Award—was lending her support to Prescott's grandson Jeb Bush, the former governor of Florida.

But not everyone in Greenwich was excited about Jeb. Jim Campbell was the chairman of the Republican Town Committee. The Campbells, like the Bushes, had deep roots in town. Jim prepped at Exeter and graduated from Harvard and Harvard Law School, before working in Europe and returning home as a real-estate executive. On a fall evening, Campbell attended a reception for Jeb Bush at the Belle Haven Club, a private tennis-and-boating club overlooking Long Island Sound. Jeb was expansive and mild, which struck Campbell as precisely wrong for the political moment: "He gave a whole talk about a woman named Juanita in South Florida, and how 'immigration is love,' and I just looked at the people I came with and said, 'Does he think he's already the nominee? He's running in a tough Republican primary, and just because we're at the Belle Haven Club doesn't mean we're all voting for him.'"

At home one night, watching television, Campbell happened on a Trump rally in Iowa. "I'm not a hard-core conservative—I'm a Republican from Greenwich," Campbell said. "But I listened, and he had that line that he would use: 'Folks, we either have a country or we don't.' And I felt the chill—like Chris Matthews with the little Obama zing up the leg. I'm, like, 'Oh, my God, this is a really good line.'" To Campbell, Trump was describing immigration in ways that resonated: "Could somebody finally say that we're allowed to enforce the law at the border without being called a racist? I lived in Switzerland for ten years. Do you think I was allowed to go around without a passport?"

Campbell tapped out a text message to a friend: "Trump live - can't turn the channel. Unbelievable. I don't think any R can beat him." Campbell watched the rally for forty-five minutes. "He was mesmerizing," he said. Not long afterward, he saw a Republican debate in which Trump described the invasion of Iraq as a mistake. For Campbell, the acknowledgment came as a catharsis. "Of *course* it was a big, fat mistake," he told himself. "He says everything I think."

In early 2016, Campbell attended a dinner for Republicans at the Delamar Greenwich Harbor, a Mediterranean-themed boutique hotel that is popular



PHOTOGRAPHS: MICHELLE PEDONE / GETTY (GOLF CART); GETTY (GOLF COURSE); GETTY (ESTATE)

In Greenwich, Trump's rise was less a hostile takeover than a joint venture. "He says everything I think," a Republican said.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL SAHRE

with local finance executives. After a dinner speaker mocked the notion of building a wall and imposing tariffs, Campbell raised his hand: "I said, 'With all due respect, why is it that we're not allowed to support a candidate who supports the things that you just ticked off?'" Campbell knew that his question would cause a stir, but he had decided that it was time "to let everybody know who I was supporting." When the event was over, he discovered that he was not alone: "I had four guys make a beeline for me, Wall Streeters, all saying, 'What can we do? Can I sign up? Are you organizing?'"

In February, 2016, with Jeb still vying for the nomination, Campbell endorsed Trump. "I just think there's a lot of people supporting Donald and don't want to say so," he told a local reporter. That spring, as Connecticut Republicans prepared to vote in their primary, political observers predicted that John Kasich, the moderate governor of Ohio, would prevail in towns and cities from Greenwich to Fairfield—a stretch of American bounty known as the Gold Coast. Instead, Trump largely dominated the region.

Four years later, Trump signs are still scarce in Greenwich (population 62,600), but his supporters are easy to find. There is the first selectman—the local equivalent of mayor—and the chairman of the Greenwich finance board, as well as an ardent backer who serves in the state House of Representatives. Some local Republicans helped fund Trump's Inauguration, and some joined his White House, including Linda McMahon, the former professional-wrestling executive who headed the Small Business Administration, and Hope Hicks, Trump's longtime communications adviser. (She once captained the Greenwich high-school lacrosse team.) Others in town have abandoned their objections to Trump. Leora Levy, who called him vulgar in the local paper, took to applauding his "leadership" and quoting him on Twitter, where she adopted some of his rhetorical style. "AMERICA WILL NEVER BE A SOCIALIST COUNTRY!!!" she posted. "WE ARE BORN FREE AND WILL STAY FREE!!!" Last fall, Trump nominated her to be the American Ambassador to Chile.

How did America's country-club Republicans, the cultural descendants of Prescott Bush, learn to love Donald Trump? They don't have much in common with the clichéd image of his admirers: anxious about losing status to minorities, resentful of imperious élites, and marooned in places where life expectancy has fallen. But the full picture has never been that simple. As early as May, 2016, exit polls and other data showed that Trump supporters earned an average of seventy-two thousand dollars a year, while supporters of Hillary Clinton earned eleven thousand dollars less. Two-thirds of Trump's supporters had incomes higher than the national median—sometimes, as in Greenwich, much higher.

I grew up in Greenwich, on Round Hill Road, not far from the club where Prescott Bush stormed out of the locker room. My great-grandparents Albert and Linda Sherer moved to town from Chicago in 1937. Albert was a Republican who worked in advertising for the National Biscuit Company, and Linda raised their two children. They were renters until 1968, when they bought a white Colonial with a wide lawn. The house passed down through the generations, and, when I was nine years old, my parents moved the family from Brooklyn to Greenwich, into a world of uncountable advantages. In 1994, I graduated from Greenwich High School, which is the rare public school that has a championship water-polo team and an electron microscope. (It was a donation, obtained by an award-winning science teacher.)

People around town have never much cared for caricatures of the place—the starchy patricians, the chinless wonders, the history of exclusion—even when there is truth in them. For decades, many African-Americans and Jews were prevented from buying homes. In 1975, protesters came to town with signs reading "COCKTAIL BIGOTS" and "SHARE THE SUMMER," because Greenwich barred nonresidents from a public beach—a restriction that lasted until the state Supreme Court overturned it, in 2001. Nobody pretends that bigotry has vanished, but these days the town has more diversity than outsiders expect. Thirty-eight per cent of its public-school students are minorities, mostly Latino; in some elementary schools, at least half the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Many of their parents work in local service jobs, bearing high rents and expenses in order to access some of the country's best public schools. Frank Farricker, a real-estate developer and a Democratic activist, said, "I tell everybody that Greenwich only discriminates on the basis of one color: green."

The seacoast of Fairfield County has always been one of America's most affluent places, but in recent decades it has sprinted ahead of the rest of the country. In 2016, according to federal estimates, it was the wealthiest metro-

NEW
from
LOCKDOWN PRESS ®
APPENDECTOMIES MADE SIMPLE
THE "IF I SAY IT'S A CASSEROLE, IT'S A CASSEROLE" ...COOKBOOK...
THE JOY OF NOT MURTILIZING EACH OTHER*
* formerly THE JOY OF SEX
R. Clt

politan area in the United States, outstripping the oil country of Midland, Texas, and the technology hub of San Francisco. Even though a string of tycoons have fled Connecticut in search of lower taxes, the latest *Forbes* ranking of the world's billionaires lists fifteen of them in the "Greater Greenwich Area," led by Ray Dalio, the founder of the hedge fund Bridgewater, who is worth an estimated eighteen billion dollars.

From afar, it is easy to misread the politics of the place: like much of America's coasts, the Gold Coast has swung left, culturally and politically, since the days of Prescott Bush. The largest share of voters in Greenwich today are unaffiliated; Republicans still hold an edge over Democrats, but the margin is less than four thousand registered voters. In 2016, nobody was surprised that Clinton beat Trump in Greenwich, fifty-seven per cent to thirty-nine. But that portrait—of liberal cosmopolitans appalled by Trump—obscures a potent element of American politics: the executive class of the Republican Party. Its members are wealthier, more conservative, and more politically active than their forebears, in ways that have helped Trump reach the White House, survive impeachment, and fortify his bid for reëlection during the anguish of the coronavirus pandemic. Understanding how he retains the overwhelming support of Republicans requires an accounting of not only what he promised Americans at the bottom but also what he provides Americans at the top.

The story of Trump's rise is often told as a hostile takeover. In truth, it is something closer to a joint venture, in which members of America's élite accepted the terms of Trumpism as the price of power. Long before anyone imagined that Trump might become President, a generation of unwitting patrons paved the way for him. From Greenwich and places like it, they launched a set of financial, philanthropic, and political projects that have changed American ideas about government, taxes, and the legitimacy of the liberal state.

The former congressman Christopher Shays is a moderate Republican who was elected eleven times to represent the Gold Coast, from 1987 to 2009. Now conservatives mock him as a RINO—a Republican in name only. "When Sean Hannity calls someone like me a RINO, I want to punch him in the nose," Shays told me. "I got elected as a Republican for thirty-four effing years, and Hannity has never gotten elected for anything." When Shays talks to former staff and constituents in Connecticut, he has come to recognize the delicate language of accommodation: "I was talking to a guy I know well, after some pathetic thing that Trump did, and his response was 'Yes, but he's selecting the right Supreme Court Justices.' I started to laugh at him, because I know for a fact that's a minor issue for him." Shays believes that many Americans quietly share Trump's desire to reduce immigration and cut social-welfare programs for the poor. "He's saying what people think, and they appreciate that," Shays said. "But not many are going to admit that's why they support him."

When it comes to the essential question—will Trump get reëlected?—the answer rests heavily on a persistent mystery: how many Americans plan to vote for him but wouldn't say so to a pollster? In Greenwich, Edward Dadakis, a corporate insurance broker who has been involved with Republican politics for fifty years, told me that many of his friends are "below the radar screen." He went on, "In a sense, I'm one of them. I'm out there in the public domain, so people know where I stand, but in 2016, for the first election ever, I did not put a bumper sticker on my car." He worries how strangers will react. He said, "I still have two 'Make America Great Again' hats at home, wrapped in plastic."

The southern panhandle of Connecticut is cradled between the gray-blue waters of Long Island Sound and the wooded border of New York State. In politics and in culture, it's a mashup of New England and New York, a place settled by Puritans who agonized over what the historian Missy Wolfe calls "the proper balance between their flock's economic success and the level of success that they deemed would offend God." Long after the Puritans were gone, the tension remained in a seesawing battle between the Brahmin and the buccaneer, service and profit, restraint and greed. For much of the twentieth century, the Brahmin had the advantage.

In 1927, Owen D. Young, a Greenwich resident who was the first chairman of General Electric, gave a speech at Harvard Business School, in which he scolded businessmen who "devise ways and means to squeeze out of labor its last ounce of effort and last penny of compensation." He encouraged them instead to "think in terms of human beings—one group of human beings who put their capital in, and another group who put their lives and labor in a common enterprise for mutual advantage." Rick Wartzman, a longtime head of the Drucker Institute and a historian of corporate behavior, told me, "This really was beyond rhetoric. We were much more of a 'we' culture than an 'I' culture." On Young's watch, G.E. became one of the first American companies to give workers a pension, profit-sharing, life insurance, medical coverage, loans, and housing assistance.

Greenwich was home to a community of progressive journalists and authors, including Lincoln Steffens, Anya Seton, and Munro Leaf. But it was most popular with executives—at General Electric, Texaco, U.S. Tobacco—who were fleeing high income taxes in New York. Other residents served as their investment bankers, a cohort that was, by today's standards, almost unrecognizably buttoned-down. By and large, local Republicans had come to accept the expansion of government under Franklin D. Roosevelt and were concerned mainly with avoiding excesses and insolvency. Showing off your money was déclassé. At Morgan Stanley, executives competed to see who could wear the cheapest watch. "Some of the wealthiest people went around dressed like gardeners," a friend of mine who grew up in Darien recalled.

One of America's most powerful capitalists, Reginald Jones, who became G.E.'s chairman and C.E.O. in 1972, lived in a modest brick Colonial in Greenwich. His daughter, Grace Vineyard, told me, "He asked my mom, 'Do you want anything more?' And she said, 'Why would we want anything more?'" Leo Hindery worked for Jones as a junior executive. "I earned fifteen thousand six hundred dollars when I got out of Stanford, and Reg's salary was two hundred thousand dollars," Hindery said. "G.E. was the preëminent company in America, and the C.E.O. was making twelve or thirteen times what I did." According to the Economic Policy Institute,

that ratio wasn't unusual: in 1965, the C.E.O. of an average large public company earned about twenty times as much as a front-line worker. Today, that figure is two hundred and seventy-eight times.

The moderate consensus was always shakier than it looked, and by the mid-sixties it was gyrating out of control. In 1955, William F. Buckley, Jr., had established his magazine *National Review* on the principle that government exists only "to protect its citizens' lives, liberty and property. All other activities of government tend to diminish freedom and hamper progress." It was the opening shot of the modern conservative movement, though, on the whole, liberal intellectuals did not regard it as a serious challenge. In 1963, John Kenneth Galbraith, the liberal economist and adviser to the Kennedys, mocked the modern conservative for being engaged in "one of man's oldest, best financed, most applauded, and, on the whole, least successful exercises in moral philosophy. That is, the search for a truly superior moral justification for selfishness."

In Greenwich, however, some people were seized by the new conservatism. J. William Middendorf II was a Harvard-educated investment banker who had served on the town council with Prescott Bush, his friend and neighbor. "I sold him a piece of land at the foot of my property," Middendorf told me. When he retired to his porch in the evening, he could hear the Bushes singing Yale songs in their back yard. But, beneath the similarities, Middendorf had adopted a strikingly different ideology; he had become, in his words, a "disciple" of the libertarian movement, enthralled by Friedrich Hayek and Joseph Schumpeter. He condemned Eisenhower's moderates for regarding government as "a working tool that should be used to shape society." Instead, he wrote, "I believe that society is shaped by individuals."

Middendorf wanted to push libertarianism into mainstream politics, and he found a vehicle in Barry Goldwater, the fiery Arizona senator. Goldwater, the heir to a department-store fortune in Phoenix, ran for President in 1964, fuelled by what he described as "my resentment against the New Deal." Goldwater's campaign was a backlash against liberalism—the antiwar movement, civil rights, welfare—but also against moderate Republicans. Nelson Rockefeller was a "cardboard candidate," Middendorf told me. "He could speak for an hour, but I honestly could not remember a single word he ever said." Middendorf became Goldwater's campaign treasurer, raising money from other well-to-do dissidents of the East Coast establishment. "He was obviously out of the mainstream, and we had an uphill battle," he said.

They prevailed that summer, at the Republican National Convention, in San Francisco. Rockefeller made a desperate last attempt for relevance: from the lectern, he denounced the advent of a "radical" right-wing element within the Party, in the hope that the moderates would rise up and resist. Instead, the hall erupted in boos. Jackie Robinson, the black baseball star and an avatar of integration among Republicans, heard the catcalls and felt, as he said later, like "a Jew in Hitler's Germany." Middendorf, who was also in attendance, received Rockefeller's denunciation as an affirmation. "He was talking about me and my friends," he wrote, in "Potomac Fever," his political memoir.

In the general election, Goldwater lost—spectacularly—to Lyndon Johnson. But his brand of libertarian, anti-tax absolutism found a fervent audience among American executives who were confronting an alarming change: after a quarter century of relentless growth, American profits were declining. Japan and Western Europe, finally rebuilt after the Second World War, were formidable new competitors; the Arab oil shock of 1973 triggered the longest recession since the thirties. Moreover, the environmental and consumer-protection movements had hastened new regulations, on products ranging from flammable fabrics to cigarettes and bank loans.

Executives felt besieged. "They decided regulation was mostly to blame," the historian Rick Perlstein writes in his forthcoming book, "Reaganland." In Perlstein's telling, "the denizens of America's better boardrooms, who had once comported themselves with such ideological gentility, began behaving like the legendary Jacobins of the French Revolution. They declared war without compromise." Back home in Greenwich, Middendorf—who went on to work in the Nixon, Ford, and Reagan Administrations—gloried in having vanquished the moderates. He wrote, "We created the conditions that put conservative Republicans back in power after more than thirty years of domination by the liberal eastern establishment—the so-called 'Country Club' Republicans."

A short drive from the Round Hill Club, in a Georgian manor overlooking a lake, lived Lee and Allie Hanley, who were early converts to the conservative movement. Lee had graduated from St. Paul's and from Yale, where he played polo, squash, and soccer, and he had taken over Hanley Co., his family's brick-and-oil business. He was a bon vivant, with a fondness for salmon-colored slacks, and a ready checkbook for political ventures. "Very warm and engaging," a Greenwich friend said. "A collector of curiosities, a Renaissance man at sort of a superficial level. More of a gut player who wanted to be in the game." Allie was a devout Christian with a keen interest in politics. The 1980 Republican primary was shaping up to be a contest between the old Republican Party and the new—George H. W. Bush, a Washington insider known around town as Poppy, versus Ronald Reagan, the conservative governor of California. On that question, the Hanleys broke with their neighbors in Greenwich. "For us, it was never Bush country," Allie told me recently. "It was always Reagan country."

Roger Stone, who was Reagan's campaign director for the Northeastern states, recalled that most people in Greenwich recoiled from his candidate: "They thought, Reagan, oh, my God, he's another Goldwater. He has no chance in the general election. He's a cowboy-movie actor." (Stone, who later became a Trump confidant, spoke to me last year, before he was convicted of lying to Congress during Robert Mueller's investigation.) "Hanley was the only high Wasp we had," Stone continued. "All the 'right' people were for Poppy."

The Hanleys, hoping to spread their

enthusiasm in Greenwich, agreed to host a reception at their home. But, when they met Reagan to discuss the plans, over lunch at the Pierre Hotel, Allie saw a problem. "He had on a brown tie, and it was ghastly," she told me. "When you go to a different part of the country, the most important thing you need to do is dress like they do. They feel more comfortable talking to you. So I ran to Bloomingdale's, and I bought four ties." When the Reagans turned up for the party, Allie said, "Here's a gift for you! Go upstairs and freshen up." Reagan came back down a few minutes later, and the offending tie had been replaced by her gift. "He wore it on all the posters after that," she said.

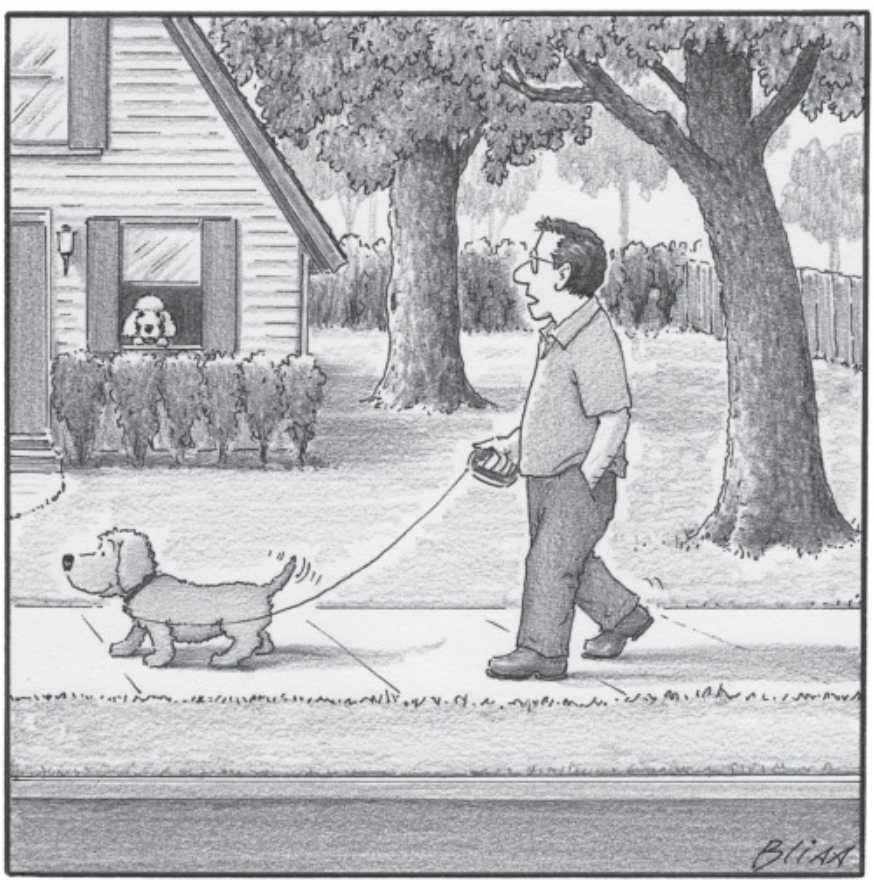
Stone and Lee Hanley adopted an approach that uncannily prefigured Trump's electoral strategy: they built a coalition of conservative élites and the white working class. Hanley introduced Stone to small-business owners in Greenwich, many of them Italian-American—"mining for Catholic votes," as Stone called it. "Lee was very well connected with the merchants in town—the grocer, the butcher," Stone said. "He could talk to anybody. He was not stuffy like some Wasps." Hanley told Stone before one visit, "We're going to have to drink some espresso, but we can get them." The strategy worked; in the Connecticut primary, Reagan beat Bush in the Bush-family stronghold of the southern panhandle. In 1984, Reagan rewarded Hanley by nominating him to the board of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Two years later, he became the chairman.

In the next three decades, Hanley and other wealthy conservatives—Richard Scaife, John Olin, the Koch brothers—helped train a generation of Republicans in Congress to adhere to ideological orthodoxy. Hanley made a string of historic political investments. He saved Regnery, America's most prominent conservative book publisher, with a crucial infusion of cash. He helped found the Yankee Institute for Public Policy, the Connecticut affiliate of a network of think tanks that advocate for low taxes and small government. He became the principal backer of a political consulting firm formed by Stone and two other young Reaganites, Charlie Black and Paul Manafort. "We had the credentials and the potential business and all that, but we didn't have any money," Black told me. "Lee was a good friend, so we approached him." Black, Manafort & Stone, as they called themselves, became pioneering lobbyists, known for their brazen use of what Manafort described as "influence peddling." Clients included Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. and a young real-estate developer named Donald Trump.

By the end of the century, the courtly politics of Prescott Bush were gone, a change accelerated by the decisions of his son George H. W. Bush. George had inherited his father's restraint—at school in Greenwich, he was nicknamed Have-Half, for his willingness to share—and also the family tradition of public service. But, running for President in 1988, Bush unleashed his brawling campaign manager Lee Atwater on the governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis. Atwater vowed to "strip the bark off the little bastard." In the most searing moment, a political-action committee linked to the Bush campaign paid for a television ad blaming Dukakis for the case of Willie Horton, a convict who had committed rape during a furlough from a Massachusetts prison. The ad crudely exploited white fears, showing pictures of Horton, who was African-American, while a narrator spoke of kidnapping, rape, and murder. Atwater denied any involvement in the ad, but Bush recognized the power of the rhetoric, and took to mentioning Horton almost daily on the stump. Atwater boasted that he would make Horton "Dukakis's running mate."

Not long before Atwater died, in 1991, he apologized to Dukakis for the "naked cruelty" of that campaign. But the Willie Horton strategy was the forerunner of a more savage era in American politics—of Swift Boat attacks on a war hero; of the racist birther fiction against America's first black President—and it pushed candidates to avoid looking weak by advancing tough-on-crime policies that both parties now view as devastating for low-income and minority Americans.

In the end, Bush was "a gentleman, but he was a politician, too," his biographer Jon Meacham wrote. For all Bush's



"She's looking right at you. Just act natural and ease up on the tail wag."

decency, he had decided early on that, in order to serve, he needed to win. In a tape-recorded diary entry near the end of the 1988 campaign, Bush told himself, "The country gets over these things fast. I have no apologies, no regrets, and if I had let the press keep defining me as a wimp, a loser, I wouldn't be where I am today."

In the early years of this century, the economic divisions that would come to define America in the age of Trump became evident on the lush back roads of Greenwich, in a sign so subtle that it was easy to miss. Many of the new estates going up were no longer surrounded by the simple stone walls, stacked to the height of a farmer's hip, that crossed the New England landscape. Instead, the builders introduced a more imposing barrier: tall, stately walls of chiselled stone, mortared in place.

The fashion for higher walls had little to do with safety; Greenwich has one of the lowest crime rates in America. To Frank Farricker, who served on the town's planning-and-zoning commission, they symbolized power and seclusion. "Instead of building two or three feet high, people got into six-footers—the 'Fuck you' walls," he said. When nearby municipalities noticed the trend, they treated it like an invasive species; they rewrote zoning rules to prevent the spread of what stonemasons took to calling "Greenwich walls."

The walls were products of one of the most extraordinary accumulations of wealth in American history. In much of the country, the corporate convulsions of the seventies had entailed layoffs, offshoring, and declining union power, but on Wall Street they inspired a surge of creativity. Since the seventeen-hundreds, Wall Street had focussed mostly on funnelling American savings into new businesses and mortgages. But, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, financiers and economists opened vast new realms of speculation and financial engineering—aggressive methods to bet on securities, merge businesses, and cut expenses using bankruptcy laws. U.S. stock markets grew twelvefold, and most of the gains accrued to the wealthiest Americans. By 2017, Wall Streeters were taking home twenty-three per cent of the country's corporate profits—and home, for many of them, was Connecticut.

The Internet allowed financiers to work from anywhere, so some escaped New York's higher taxes by relocating their offices closer to where they lived. Newspapers took to calling Greenwich the "Hedge Fund Capital of the World." The dealmakers earned vastly more than the industrial executives they had replaced. In 2004, *Institutional Investor* reported that the top twenty-five hedge-fund managers earned an average of two hundred and seven million dollars a year.

Nine of those top managers lived or worked in Greenwich, led by Edward Lampert, who in 2004 earned an estimated $1.02 billion after orchestrating the merger of Kmart and Sears. Lampert was not one to dress like a gardener; just offshore, he docked his yacht, a two-hundred-and-eighty-eight-foot vessel that he had named Fountainhead, for Ayn Rand's individualist fable. (Trump has said that he identifies with the book's hero, Howard Roark, a designer of skyscrapers who declares, "I do not recognize anyone's right to one minute of my life. . . . No matter who makes the claim, how large their number, or how great their need.") So much individual wealth accumulated in southern Connecticut that tax officials took to monitoring the quarterly payments of a half-dozen of the richest taxpayers, because their personal earnings would affect how much the entire state was able to spend on public services.

Around town, Morgan Stanley executives no longer competed to wear the cheapest wristwatch. (The current chairman and C.E.O., James Gorman, is celebrated on watch-enthusiast blogs for a rare Rolex that can sell for seventeen thousand dollars.) Jack Welch, who succeeded Reginald Jones at G.E., retired in 2001 with a record severance package of more than four hundred million dollars. One of Jones's friends, the investor Vincent Mai, was dismayed that many business leaders put short-term interests ahead of long-term vision. "The culture changed into grabbing as much as you can, as quickly as you can," Mai, the founder and chairman of the Cranemere Group, told me. "Restraint just seems to have gone out the window."

The money physically redrew Greenwich, as financiers built estates on a scale once favored by Gilded Age railroad barons. The hedge-fund manager Steven A. Cohen paid $14.8 million in cash for a house, then added an ice rink, an indoor

SAND

The sand sticks to me as though it had fallen
as snow the silica's wet glitter dry.

I am coated with a line as if I had lain
in water floating like the boats that lie

about what they are on in the glare—
sky and water interchanging their light.

I am uncertain what luminary
bears this sandcastle illusion upright.

This beach wasn't here before the hurricane,
houses that were here aren't here either.

The glaciation of this earth-change planes
away the known in the thin curl we feared

it was
something we brush off that could be brushed off.

—Ed Roberson

basketball court, putting greens, a fairway, and a massage room, ultimately swelling the building to thirty-six thousand square feet—larger than the Taj Mahal. In a final flourish, Cohen obtained special permission to surround his estate with a wall that exceeded the town's limits on height. It was nine feet tall.

When the tide began to turn against Wall Street, you could follow it from my family's front door. Up and down Round Hill Road, neighbors became known for one imbroglio after another. If you took a right turn out of our driveway, you could wander by the stone Colonial house of Walter Noel, a money manager with a gracious Nashville accent, who funnelled billions of his clients' dollars to the grifter Bernie Madoff. (Noel claimed that he, too, was duped.) If you turned left, you reached the estate of the hedge-fund manager Raj Rajaratnam, who once celebrated his birthday by flying in Kenny Rogers to sing "The Gambler" over and over, until Rogers finally refused. In 2009, Rajaratnam was arrested as part of a stock-cheating case that the F.B.I. called Operation Perfect Hedge. He was given a sentence of eleven years in prison, the longest ever for insider trading. Eventually, so many neighbors were ensnared in financial scandals that a local blogger nicknamed our street Rogues Hill Road.

In truth, nobody was shocked that the vast new fortunes of the Gold Coast contained the seeds of financial catastrophe. In the run-up to the 2008 crisis, William Wechsler was a managing director at Greenwich Associates, a consulting firm, where he saw financiers taking ever-larger risks. Historically, the bylaws of the New York Stock Exchange had required trading firms, such as Goldman Sachs, to be private partnerships. "When it was time for you to go, you sold your share to the next generation," Wechsler told me. "It was culturally acceptable to get to a certain level of success and retire happy." But, by 1999, the rules had changed, the big banks had become public companies, and investors expected large returns. Hedge funds and other firms made huge bets, in pursuit of dramatic windfalls. Instead of directing most of their capital to funding businesses that hired people and made things, the financiers in New York and Connecticut had become an economy unto themselves. "Every year that goes by, more and more of the added value in our society goes toward capital, and less and less toward labor," Wechsler told me. "What you end up with is a very unstable society."

On top of that, Wall Street was hiring lobbyists to dismantle regulations that protected the country from an economic fiasco. In some cases, Greenwich residents led the big banks that lobbied for destructive changes. John Reed was a co-chairman of Citigroup, and William B. Harrison, Jr., was the chief executive of JPMorgan Chase. Their banks were two of the largest contributors to Senator Phil Gramm, the Texas Republican who engineered a ban on the regulation of over-the-counter derivatives. Later, the government's official autopsy of the collapse called that ban "a key turning point in the march toward the financial crisis," because "derivatives rapidly spiraled out of control and out of sight."

As the economy quaked, the shock waves reverberated through politics. The Tea Party movement raged against Obama, taxes, and social-welfare programs, helping Republicans to greater gains in the 2010 midterms than in any congressional election in six decades. Even in Greenwich, where people are not quick to hoist placards, Tea Party activists protested in front of Town Hall, and the first selectman Peter Tesei, the town's top elected official, joined in. "Liberty has contracted today because the role of government has expanded," he told the crowd. (Tesei, like many of his ideological allies, later pledged to support Trump.)

The sentiment was a familiar one—even the Romans resented their taxes—but Greenwich was not traditionally known for absolutism on the subject. In the nineteen-eighties, Lowell Weicker, a Greenwich Republican who had served as first selectman and gone on to the U.S. Senate, became known in Washington for blocking Reagan's attempts to cut spending on health and education. In 1991, after Weicker became governor, he imposed Connecticut's personal income tax, which was so unpopular that protesters cursed and spat at him. In a speech that fall, he said, "Respect—if not reëlection—comes from speaking the truth."

But, to some in the current generation, especially Greenwich's new concentration of libertarians, a fiercer resistance to taxes and to government was a matter of moral principle. Cliff Asness, a billionaire who runs AQR Capital Management, was among the most vocal. When Governor Andrew Cuomo, of New York, discussed raising taxes on hedge funds, Asness tweeted that he was a "flat out lying demagogue," who was trying to run a "gulag not a state." Around town, the expectation that a person of substantial means might pay substantial taxes no longer held sway. That became especially clear in 2013, when Thomas Foley, a Greenwich private-equity investor, ran for governor. He owned a yacht, a number of vintage cars, two British fighter jets, and a house that Greenwich *Time* likened to "the Hogwarts castle." But, on tax returns that he showed reporters, he had claimed so many investment losses and alimony payments that his federal taxes amounted to six hundred and seventy-three dollars that year. (Foley lost the race.)

Charles Rossotti, a Republican businessman who served as the commissioner of the I.R.S. from 1997 to 2002, has estimated that sophisticated tax ploys and shelters cause ordinary citizens to pay an extra fifteen per cent in taxes each year. Brooke Harrington, an economic sociologist at Dartmouth, told me, "Some of that shortfall just never gets made up. Those are roads that don't get improved, public transport that doesn't get built, schools that don't get fixed." Connecticut has the richest one per cent of any state, but, according to several studies of crumbling infrastructure, its roads are among the worst in the country.

Harrington said, "For an earlier generation, even if your heart wasn't in it, you'd say, 'I've got to join the local charity board, to project that I deserve this wealth.'" The current generation, instead of focussing on the local charity board, prefers targeted private philanthropy, bypassing public decisions on whom to help and how. "The underlying massive change is that wealth no longer needs to justify itself—it is self-justifying," Harrington said. "I look back, and I think, That's when we gave up on being a 'we.'"

In the political ferment brought on by the Tea Party and the resistance to Obama, conservative donors expanded their influence. The Hanleys became funders of Turning Point USA,

"I thought I was a hoarder, but it turns out I'm a prepper."

• •

a nonprofit, founded in 2012, that promotes conservatism in high schools and colleges. More important, Allie Hanley helped its founder, Charlie Kirk, meet other donors. "Allie Hanley opened the entire southern corridor for us," he wrote later. Kirk is now a conservative celebrity and the chairman of Students for Trump, a campus political network. In recent years, Turning Point has faced multiple controversies. Some student governments have sought to ban it for interfering in their elections; staff and members have been discovered making racist comments. Last year, a video showed Riley Grisar, the head of a Turning Point chapter in Nevada, saying "white power," with his arm wrapped around a woman who said, "Fuck the niggers." (Grisar was removed from the organization.)

Lee Hanley used his fortune to elevate candidates on the right wing of the Republican Party. In 2014, he donated some three hundred and fifty-seven thousand dollars; the money went to stars such as Ted Cruz, but also to oddball outsiders like Chris McDaniel, a Mississippi state lawmaker and former talk-radio host who was trying to unseat the incumbent senator, Thad Cochran. McDaniel lost, but his campaign themes were a preview of politics to come; before Trump was popularizing anti-immigrant rhetoric, McDaniel was pledging to block increases in residency permits and work visas. (When McDaniel ran for the Senate again, in 2018, he embraced a blunter racial message, arguing to preserve a Confederate emblem on the state flag.)

But none of Hanley's political investments would pay off as well as an obscure project for which Steve Bannon, Trump's former strategist, calls him one of the nation's "unsung heroes." Not long after Mitt Romney lost to Obama, in 2012, Hanley commissioned a pollster named Patrick Caddell to investigate why conventional Republican candidates were underperforming. Caddell had made his name advising Jimmy Carter, but he had broken with Democrats and begun appearing frequently on Fox News. As he and Hanley discussed the project, both suspected that the electoral returns suggested a deep frustration with the status quo. "I said, 'I think something's happening in the country,'" Caddell recalled. "Lee said, 'You know, I think something may be, too. I want you to go out and just find out.'" Caddell's polls quickly suggested that the "level of discontent in this country was beyond anything measurable."

In 2013, Hanley asked Caddell to show his findings to Bannon, and to another patron, the hedge-fund billionaire Robert Mercer. They huddled over the data during a conservative conference in Palm Beach. The numbers, Caddell told them, indicated a public appetite for a populist challenger who could run as an outsider, exposing corruption and rapacity. He called it the Candidate Smith project—the search for a political savior along the lines of "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington."

When Trump took an early lead in 2015, most of the political and financial world ignored him. Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, a professor at the Yale School of Management, attended a salon that summer at the Connecticut home of Larry Kudlow, the business commentator who now leads Trump's National Economic Council. "It was a lot of very deep-pocketed Republicans from Greenwich and New York," Sonnenfeld told me. "Not one person had a pleasant thing to say about Trump." Sonnenfeld urged them to take Trump's chances seriously, but a fellow-guest, who worked for a super PAC supporting Ted Cruz in the primaries, disagreed. "She said, 'I'm a lifelong expert on the psychographics of women's voter behavior, and I can tell you that Donald Trump will never get two per cent of Republican women voters,'" Sonnenfeld told me. "She got wild applause. That was Kellyanne Conway." (Conway, now a senior adviser to Trump, called this a "specious, self-serving claim," adding, "I don't know 'Professor' So-and-So.")

But Caddell and Hanley concluded that Trump was the closest thing they would find to a Candidate Smith. He had none of Reagan's optimism, but he had name recognition, money, and a preternatural sense of how a billionaire could surf the rage kicked up by the financial crisis. Their conviction persuaded Mercer to invest in Trump, and other wealthy donors followed. As Election Day approached, Charlie Glazer, a Greenwich money manager who had served as George W. Bush's Ambassador to El Salvador, began talking to

friends, "rationalizing why we should all vote for Trump," one recalls.

For some, it was a plainly calculated choice. Thomas Peterffy, a billionaire who owned the largest estate in Greenwich, donated to Trump but never pretended to admire him. "When the choice is between two ideologies, then it's a luxury to dwell on the personalities of the candidates," he told me. "It's a luxury that we cannot afford." Peterffy, who made his fortune as a pioneer in digital trading, said that the choice was between "a high degree of government regulation or a diminished amount of government regulation, because, basically, that's how the U.S. will get to socialism—increasing government regulation."

When the votes were counted, Trump's greatest support in Greenwich was not in the middle-class sections of downtown. It was in two of the wealthiest precincts—the Tenth and Eleventh Districts, which sprawl across the lush northern backcountry, encompassing the Round Hill Club, where Prescott Bush once reigned, and the estate of Steven Cohen, the investor with the nine-foot wall. Cohen, whose hedge fund closed in 2014, after pleading guilty to insider trading, donated a million dollars to support the Inauguration. Peterffy chipped in a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Glazer joined the transition.

Hanley didn't live to see it. He died in Greenwich, four days before the 2016 election. Bannon wishes that more people knew about his discreet contribution to the movement. "Lee Hanley is like, when you read the history of the American Revolution or the Civil War—all these great events—you find out about these individuals in back that never won any credit, but, if it was not for them, the victory would not be achieved," he told a conservative audience in 2017. "He had a real love of the hobbits, of the deplorables, and he put his money where his mouth was."

Every town in America has its story of what changed after the 2016 election. In Greenwich, the Trump era started almost instantly. In December, a town employee reported to police that Christopher von Keyserling, a well-known member of the town council, had touched her groin after saying, "I love this new world. I no longer have to be politically correct." Lynn Mason, the accuser, warned him not to touch her again, to which he allegedly replied, "It would be your word against mine, and nobody will believe you." After the town government contacted von Keyserling about the complaint, he said that Mason had overreacted to a "little pinch," according to court records. He was charged with misdemeanor sexual assault. He pleaded not guilty and is awaiting trial.

The combination of Trump and the von Keyserling incident caused an immediate reaction in Greenwich: women signed up to run for office, and more than fifty won seats on the town council. "A lot of us just woke up," Joanna Swomley, a retired lawyer who entered the race, said. "We were horrified." Swomley organized a local chapter of Indivisible, a progressive network, to heighten public engagement. It worked. In 2017, Greenwich Democrats won control of the town finance board for the first time in recorded history; the next year, they won seats in the state legislature that no Democrat had occupied since Herbert Hoover was in the White House.

But the blue wave quickly subsided. In 2019, Republicans reclaimed control of the finance board, and elected as first selectman a local businessman and state lawmaker named Fred Camillo, who had voted for Trump. At the voting booths, Swomley sensed a change in the atmosphere. "I was holding a Democrat's sign, and a Republican yelled out, 'Oh, hell no!' It was not the embarrassment, the quietness that you saw in 2017. It was 'I am going to own this. I like this.'"

Claire Tisne Haft, a Greenwich *Time* columnist who lives in town with her husband and three kids, was appalled by Trump, and she assumed that her neighbors were, too. She got her first indication to the contrary at a dance recital for her daughter, when another mother told her how excited she was to "see what Trump can do." Not long afterward, Tisne Haft and her husband had dinner with friends, and the conversation turned to politics. "We realized halfway through the meal that we had to adjust our tone," she told me.

In March, 2019, a seemingly unrelated bit of news helped illuminate Trump's local support. That month, a powerful Greenwich attorney named Gordon Caplan, the co-chairman of the law firm Willkie Farr & Gallagher, was indicted for paying seventy-five thousand dollars for a test proctor to fix his daughter's ACT exam. Caplan was one of fifty-three defendants in the college-admissions scandal, a list dotted with addresses in Greenwich, Atherton, and Bel Air. In phone calls recorded by the F.B.I., Rick Singer, the consultant behind the scam, had explained to Caplan that his daughter would never know that her family had cheated on her behalf: "She will think that she's really super smart and she got lucky on a test." Caplan uttered one of the scandal's indelible expressions: "To be honest, I'm not worried about the moral issue here." Caplan pleaded guilty and served a month in prison.

In a column after the scandal broke, Tisne Haft wrote that the case brought up "a whole lot of uncomfortable in a town like Greenwich." It exposed how far some of America's most powerful, educated, and prosperous people will go to give their families an advantage in a life already full of them.

Tisne Haft sensed that some people in town had become so cynical about the workings of power that they had lost their moral footing. "A friend said, 'You know those kids whose parents gave libraries to their colleges? How is that so different than pushing the boundaries of the truth about your kid?'" Tisne Haft told me. "I just had to look at this person and say, 'Hang on. Someone *Photoshopped a kid's head onto a picture*.' I feel like we jumped off a cliff there somewhere and didn't notice."

The admissions case reminded me of the rationale I kept hearing for looking past Trump's behavior toward women, minorities, immigrants, war heroes, the F.B.I., democracy, and the truth, not to mention his request that Ukraine "do us a favor" by investigating his political opponents: a conviction that, ultimately, nothing matters more than cutting taxes and regulations and slowing immigration. Places like Greenwich

take pride in their commitment to civility and decency, but Caplan's indifference to the "moral issue," as he put it, bespoke the kind of quiet compromises that a person makes in the privacy of a phone call, or a voting booth.

Even before the 2020 campaign was under way—before the rise and fall of Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, before the virus that upturned every assumption about the race—it was clear that the essential fault line in American politics was inequality. At times, this anger showed up on the Gold Coast. In 2017, activists staged a bus tour of Greenwich, called "Lifestyles of the Rich and Shameless," which stopped outside the homes (or, more often, the walls) of local financiers. They left giant "tax bills," charging the owners for what the tour's organizers called "the havoc they've wreaked on our economy." At the time, Connecticut was considering cutting four thousand state jobs, to relieve a $1.7-billion budget deficit. The activists' final stop was at the office of the libertarian Cliff Asness, where they erected a giant inflatable pig, chomping on a cigar.

As of last year, America's four hundred richest individuals owned about three trillion dollars in wealth—more than all black households and a quarter of all Latino households combined, according to the Institute for Policy Studies. In calmer moments, Americans have tended to regard our largest fortunes as a kind of national spectacle and, for some, a source of inspiration. Now polls routinely confirm a survey by NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal*, in which seventy per cent of Americans describe themselves as angry "because our political system seems to only be working for the insiders with money and power."

Amid this populist outrage, some prominent citizens of Greenwich have joined the ranks of business leaders who say that capitalism must change in order to survive. Dalio, the town's richest resident, calls income inequality a "national emergency"; his family philanthropy has donated to Connecticut public schools. Last fall, the hedge-fund manager Paul Tudor Jones urged a Greenwich audience to recognize that workers have been shortchanged, though he hastened to reassure attendees: "It wasn't because good people did bad things. It was unfortunately just a natural, unchecked movement." Alan Barry, the town's commissioner of human services, told me that he applauds the concern but disagrees with the notion that inequality was unforeseeable. "Stated policies combined to create this," he said. "Now you're turning around and saying, 'Whoa, we've got runaway capitalism.'"

The targets of broad American antipathy tend not to look inward for its source. "It's all this rapid technological change that results in income inequality," Peterffy told me. "It suddenly increases productivity, and we need fewer workers to produce the same amount of goods and services." One remedy, he said, is direct payments to citizens, and he has become an advocate for replacing all government benefits with a universal basic income: "It is much, much cheaper to give the people money and not restrict business in any way." I asked Peterffy, who built a fortune worth an estimated fourteen billion dollars, if he thought America could have avoided radical inequality by not permitting people like him to amass so much money. "Well, it would have decreased my incentive to work as hard as I did," he said. "The number of times I nearly went bankrupt, if I would have had an easier way out, I probably would've chosen that." In 2017, Peterffy sold his Greenwich estate; he now lives in Florida, which has no state income tax.

If you are among the Greenwich élite, whether you love Trump or hate him, it is easy to count the ways that he has oriented his Administration to help people like you. When Trump introduced his tax bill, he called it a gift to "the folks who work in the mail rooms and the machine shops of America." That was absurd. The bill cut the corporate tax rate by fourteen per cent, and most of the windfall went to investors in the form of dividends and stock buybacks. Trump pledged to "eliminate tax breaks and complex loopholes" favored by the rich. Though he limited the deductions for state and local taxes, wealthy citizens were compensated by new tax breaks, including some specifically for the commercial-real-estate industry and for wealthy heirs. On average, Trump gave households in the top one per cent a forty-eight-thousand-dollar tax cut, while those in the bottom twenty per cent received a hundred and twenty dollars, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, a nonpartisan think tank. Jim Campbell, the Republican organizer who embraced Trump early in 2016, told me recently, "I don't know anyone who voted for Donald Trump in 2016 and won't vote for him again. In Greenwich, he'll probably pick up some votes."

This spring, when the pandemic paralyzed New York City, the effects echoed through the suburbs; the city of Stamford reported that a crematory had caught fire after wiring melted from overuse. As in other parts of the country, some people resented the requirements for social distancing. After Greenwich closed its beaches and parks, Thomas Byrne, who holds Prescott Bush's old job as moderator of the Greenwich town council, told the local media that the government's measures were "the greatest assault on our freedom in my lifetime," adding, "Why we don't have a revolution in the streets escapes me."

Not everyone was ready to stand on principle, though. As stock markets sank, the investor Cliff Asness reconsidered his objections to government aid. On Twitter, he made a series of "economic suggestions that kind of hurt me to admit," he wrote. "We need, and I don't think I've ever said this before, fiscal help. We need fiscal relief for individuals and small (and maybe large) businesses." Anticipating the charge of hypocrisy, he wrote, "Yes, I'm losing libertarian bonafides here. I'm ok with that." When the President eventually signed a relief bill, in March, it included a tax deduction, mostly for hedge funds and real-estate businesses, that was worth an average of $1.7 million for each of America's forty-three thousand wealthiest taxpayers and cost the Treasury about ninety billion dollars in the first year.

In various ways, the virus confronted Americans with the result of a generation's worth of political decisions. Even on the Gold Coast, the virus exposed cracks in the economic foundation; in Greenwich, municipal employees have been scrambling to provide emergency meal deliveries to some seven hundred families a week. Alan Barry, the town

official, told me, "Greenwich represents two Americas. The haves and have-nots are literally separated and do not mix."

Most of all, the virus seemed to magnify the central issue running through America's discussions of wealth and fairness: How, exactly, would a fractured country define its understanding of the public good? Who are Americans ready to help? And who are we willing to ignore?

Few people in Greenwich have more reason to consider these questions than Michael Mason, who serves as the chairman of the town finance board, a sterile-sounding job with vast authority over daily life. He presides over discussions on how much to spend on special education, on poverty programs, and on the teaching of English as a second language. Last week, despite public protests from parents and students, Mason cast the deciding vote in favor of deep cuts to the town's education budget, citing the economic effects of the pandemic.

• •

Mason is tall, with parted silver hair and an earnest zeal for discussions of budgets and civic minutiae. His father flew a plane in the Second World War, and his two older brothers fought in Vietnam. Mason grew up in town, worked in the family aviation business, and volunteered as a fireman, before owning a branch of Million Air, a company that serves the private-jet industry.

He is also perhaps the town's earliest Trump supporter. He attended the campaign announcement in which Trump descended a golden escalator and promised to build a wall against "rapists" from Mexico. "I'm friends with the family," he told me. He met Trump's sons Don, Jr., and Eric through a conservation club for hunters in Chappaqua, New York. They invited him to the Convention, in case they needed votes to thwart a challenge from within the Party. "I'm not going to run south under political pressure," Mason said. Later, he joined them for private celebrations on Election Night and Inauguration Day.

Mason knows that the President's "culture" still upsets many people in Greenwich. But, he said, "his policies over the last three years have gained more attention and probably more support." He predicts that the trauma of the pandemic will persuade some voters that Trump was right to want to cut immigration and lure back industries from abroad. "He had policies that he wanted to change on our borders, on immigration. I certainly think people in this country now are worried about that."

With the economy in crisis, Mason suspects that Trump will succeed in turning any rebound into a political asset. "There are people in the town right now—I guarantee you—who are saying, 'Wow, this happened to me in '08. My 401(k) went from X down to Y,'" he said. "What is Donald Trump telling you? 'We're going to do everything we need to so it does not take ten years to get you back where it was.' I haven't heard Joe Biden say that."

Eventually, we wound our way to the inevitable question: How do you make your peace with Trump? His behavior toward women and immigrants? His separation of children from parents at the border? The "shithole" countries? Mason listened calmly. "I have no control over that," he said. "What I have control over is what I worry about—the health and safety of my family, financial security of my family." I pressed him, but he didn't budge. "I've been empowered to care about the financial administrative affairs of a municipality with sixty thousand people sleeping at night," he said. "I care about them."

As Americans have reckoned with the origins of our political moment—the Trump years, the fury on all sides, the fraying of a common purpose—we have tended to focus on the effects of despair among members of the working class who felt besieged by technology, globalization, immigration, and trade. But that ignores the effects of seclusion among members of the governing class, who helped disfigure our political character by demonizing moderation and enfeebling the basic functions of the state. We—or they, depending on where you stand—receded behind gracious walls.

On the ground where I grew up, some of America's powerful people have championed a version of capitalism that liberates wealth from responsibility. They embraced a fable of self-reliance (except when the fable is untenable), a philosophy of business that leaches more wealth from the real economy than it creates, and a vision of politics that forgives cruelty as the price of profit. In the long battle between the self and service, we have, for the moment, settled firmly on the self. To borrow a phrase from a neighbor in disgrace, we stopped worrying about "the moral issue here." ♦

Night trains are making a comeback, and, even at a time of enforced leisure, their nostalgic luxury and latent sense of adventure

make them a perfect imaginative indulgence.

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

LETTER FROM EUROPE

BECAUSE THE NIGHT

The enduring romance of the sleeper train.

BY ANTHONY LANE

If on a winter's night a traveller is about to board a train, a fortifying drink is of the essence. Thus it was that I stood in line at Burger King, on the concourse at Queen Street station, in Glasgow, and asked for a hot tea. The only reason that I wasn't seeking out a dram of whiskey was that I had already done so, dropping into a pub on my way to the station. In short, I was well drammed up—as was the Glaswegian beside me, who leaned on the counter and inquired what I was up to. Taking the Caledonian Sleeper to London, I replied. He fixed me with a canny eye and said, "Are you not afraid o' the wee virus?"

The answer, foolishly, was no. I was too excited by the thought o' catching the wee train to be worried about catching anything else. It was late evening, on February 28th; the year would soon leap into the twenty-ninth, and that touch of temporal rarity added to the occasion. The departure of a night train—by definition, a humdrum event for the station staff—exudes, for all but the most jaded travellers, the thrill of an unfamiliar ritual. By day, if late, you run for a train; if early, you tut and sigh at having to tarry so long. At night, on the other hand, you saunter, and deliberately show up in good time. Why? Not because of security, passport control, or the other chores that affront the airline passenger, shortening tempers and sapping every soul, but because you want to settle in and enjoy the show. Patiently, the train awaits you, with a theatrical air of suspense, and the moment of its leaving is akin to the curtain's rise. T. S. Eliot, for one, knew the moment well:

> There's a whisper down the line at 11:39
> When the Night Mail's ready to depart

That is the opening of "Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat," from "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats," published in 1939. Skimbleshanks, with his "glass-green eyes," is a calming and supervising presence on the London-to-Glasgow line. His train departs, like mine, at twenty minutes to midnight, and he, too, consumes a cup of tea en route, "with perhaps a drop of Scotch." As for Eliot's account of the sleeping compartments, not much has changed:

> Oh it's very pleasant when you have found
> your little den
> With your name written up on the door.
> And the berth is very neat with a newly
> folded sheet
> And there's not a speck of dust on the floor.
> There is every sort of light—you can make
> it dark or bright;
> There's a handle that you turn to make a
> breeze.
> There's a funny little basin you're supposed
> to wash your face in
> And a crank to shut the window if you
> sneeze.

If you want to teach a child the basics of onomatopoeia (and who doesn't?), the *clickety-lickety-clack* of Eliot's meter is a pretty good place to start. When I first read the poem, at the age of eight or nine, I thought that the chime of "basin" and "face in" was the funniest rhyme of all time. Decades later, and in spite of hot competition from Byron's terminal couplets in "Don Juan," I stand by my choice. All the more gratifying to discover that, in my very neat berth on the Caledonian Sleeper, I would, indeed, be in a position to wash my face in a basin.

But what position is that? In a word: hunched. Wide-open spaces, remember, are those green or rocky things *outside* a train, designed to be stared at through the window. Inside, all roaming is restricted. Only very seldom can you swing a cat, even if you can find a cat who agrees to be swung, and how, exactly, James Bond and his SPECTRE-trained adversary made room in a sleeping compartment for mortal combat, in "From Russia with Love," I have no idea.

As for suitcases, don't bother. To embark with bulky baggage is asking for

trouble, and, should it come to a scrap between you and your Samsonite, you will lose. Hence the contents of my rucksack on the Caledonian Sleeper, whittled to the bare necessities: toothbrush, toothpaste, Turgenev, T-shirt, underwear, and socks. When turning from the window to the door, in my compartment, I had to revolve on the spot, as if roasting on a vertical spit, and, despite my being the sole occupant, both bunks had been let down, locked into place, and joined by a ladder. A printed notice offered advice: "Guests should use the ladders in the traditional manner, by always facing the bed as they climb up and down." What other manner is there? Had the train recently hosted the cast of Cirque du Soleil, perhaps, who insisted on descending head first, arms outstretched, after crooking one knee over the top rung?

No less baffling was the Room Service Menu. Pies, cheeses, broth, smoked venison on a platter, and a parade of wines and spirits: all these, and more, could be ferried to one's bedside. Caledoniaphiles were urged to dine on "Haggis, Neeps & Tatties"—neeps meaning turnips, tatties meaning potatoes, and haggis meaning all your deepest terrors wrapped up in a sphere of stomach skin, then boiled. Precisely what you want to snack on, in other words, while passing through a tunnel at half past two in the morning. The entire feast could be washed down with a Ginger Laddie. Don't ask.

Thirty-five years ago, I had taken the same line, in the opposite direction. A very different experience: no neeps, no Wi-Fi, no bed. The service was then known as the Night Rider, and the ride would not have disgraced a rodeo. A bunch of us, all students, huddled and shifted in seats that felt as laid-back as lampposts. Daring sallies were launched to the onboard bar. We grabbed, on average, fourteen winks, and, at journey's end, staggered forth into a Scottish dawn so bleak that it froze the bones.

You can still buy plain seats on the Caledonian Sleeper, and they cost a fraction of the single or double rooms. The economics of night trains, in Europe and elsewhere, rest on two basic theorems. First, the closer you adhere to the perpendicular, the less you pay. An upright vigil in the corridor, during which you stare into the darkness and contemplate the infinite, is dirt cheap. Second, once you do lie flat, communal flatness is better value than solitude. The standard compromise is the couchette, a compartment fitted with four or six bunks: fun for a family, and rousingly unpredictable when you get tossed into a stew of strangers. Urban legends abound. Hands are said to reach up from the bunk beneath you, in response to your telltale snores, and deftly extract your wallet. And I once heard of a roving youth who, ensconced with newfound companions in a friendly couchette, was offered a cup of coffee in southern Bulgaria and woke up, two days later, in a quiet siding outside Thessaloniki, devoid of every possession except his boxer shorts. You just don't *get* that level of service on a plane.

Not that high-end sleepers are devoid of risk. Habitués of the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, for example, which, in defiance of its name, can shuttle you from Paris to Istanbul, are encouraged to "trade stories with fellow travellers in the Bar Car as the pianist plays." Imagine hearing the same anecdote, from the same retired fund manager, all the way across a continent. Should you book the Cabin Suite, "formed of two interconnecting Double Cabins," you will be granted the unique opportunity for a blazing, champagne-fuelled argument with your beloved on the first night. Having slammed the connecting door, both of you can then sulk in ultimate luxury for five long days, and all for thirty-seven thousand dollars. Each.

There's no disguising the itch that drives the Caledonian Sleeper. It wants to be a hotel. Such is the lofty ambition on which the principle of the sleeping car is based. The pioneer of that principle was George Pullman. Not since Monsieur Guillotin came up with a device for making decapitation more user-friendly has an individual been so closely associated with a product. Pullman, born in 1831, was an engineer whose idea of a challenge was to jack up whole buildings in the mud-bound streets of Chicago, allowing drainage systems to be installed underneath. A similar aversion to mess and inconvenience was one of the motives that spurred him to introduce the Pullman sleeping car, in 1859. Ladies and gentlemen, he reasoned, would pay to travel in comfort; the plusher the comfort, the more swiftly his clients might forget that they were travelling at all. On his much improved model, of 1865, the upholstered seats were indeed covered in plush, to accompany the brass fittings and the walnut walls.

As if to demonstrate that nothing, not even tragedy, could interrupt the national genius for entrepreneurship, the funeral train that carried the body of Abraham Lincoln from Washington to Springfield, Illinois, included a Pullman car on the final leg of its journey. By then, the train, which had crossed seven states, had become a story unto itself. The market followed the mourning, and, in 1867, the Pullman Palace Car Company was founded. The wealthy, and the aspiring middle classes, were offered the chance to sleep in peace, on the move, much as their national hero had been borne to his eternal rest. The deal would be sealed when his eldest son, Robert Todd Lincoln, was made president of Pullman, in 1897, and then, in 1911, chairman of the board.

The gradual upgrading of Pullman cars can be read as a fever chart of consumers' wants. In 1887, a vestibule was inaugurated which allowed smooth access from one carriage to another and led to such delights as the drawing room and the smoking room, aromatic with domesticity. Women travellers, growing in number, were provided with dressing rooms. Air-conditioning began to flow in 1929, and the nineteen-thirties saw the début of the Duplex and the Roomette—not a word that I could nerve myself to utter in front of a booking clerk, but, qua period detail, it has the right snap and click. In "Night Trains," a lovingly erudite book of 2017, Andrew Martin reports that Pullman cars were also "equipped with hairdressing salons, organs (for church services) and libraries." When a train can meet

THE FIRE GILDER

She loved silver, she loved gold,
my mother. She spoke about the influence
of metals, the congruence of atoms,
the art classes where she learned
these things: think of it
she would say as she told me
to gild any surface a master craftsman
had to meld gold with mercury,
had to heat both so one was volatile,
one was not
and to do it right
had to separate them and then
burn, burn, burn mercury
until it fled and left behind
a skin of light. *The only thing*, she added—
but what came after that I forgot.

What she spent a lifetime forgetting
could be my subject:
the fenced-in small towns of Leinster,
the coastal villages where the language
of the sea was handed on,
phrases bruised by storms,
by shipwrecks. But isn't.
My subject is the part wishing plays in
the way villages are made
to vanish, in the way I learned
to separate memory from knowledge,
so one was volatile, one was not
and how I started writing,
burning light,
building heat until all at once
I was the fire gilder
ready to lay radiance down,
ready to decorate *it happened*
with *it never did* when
all at once I remember what it was
she said: *the only thing is*
it is extremely dangerous.

—Eavan Boland (1944-2020)

every private and civic need, why would you ever get off?

Of particular note, throughout this process, was the deployment of the beds. In America, the custom was to place them lengthways, so that your body, when horizontal, slotted into the train like a bullet in the breach of a rifle. If you want to see this arrangement at work, its neatness crying out for comic disruption, I refer you to "Some Like It Hot," in which Sweet Sue and her band, topped by a singer named Sugar (Marilyn Monroe), take the sleeper from Chicago to Florida. Arrayed on either side of the car's central corridor are ranks of bunks, upper and lower, each of them guarded, demurely but uselessly, by curtains. A nocturnal party is thrown in bunk No. 7, with Manhattans mixed in a rubber hot-water bottle. You can keep your Orient Express.

In Europe, on the other hand, bunks on a night train have traditionally been set at ninety degrees to the direction of travel, like the teeth of a comb. (Of the many gulfs between the Old World and the New, this could be the most bewildering. Do American passengers, made of sterner purpose, prefer the thrustful sensation of being propelled?) A photograph from 1888 shows a private compartment, with two of the transverse bunks in place and primed for action. Every surface, including the floor and the mattresses, is sumptuously patterned and softened, as if to induce a languid hush. The name for such a haven was a "boudoir car," and you can see why, for it breathes what one prim and titled Englishwoman scorned as "the atmosphere of vulgar depravity" that prevailed on *trains de luxe*. Her name, by the way, was Lady Chatterley.

To pick your way through the vestiges of the great European trains is a task not so much for historians of transport as for paleontologists. It is a lost world, in which Tsar Nicholas II could have a *cow car*, if you please, attached to his personal train on a visit to Germany, to keep the imperial children furnished with fresh milk. The landscape of this Trainaceous Era was crammed with rogues, chancers, visionaries, and tightfisted despots. Meet Colonel William d'Alton Mann, formerly of the Fifth Michigan Cavalry, who devised the boudoir car; King Boris of Bulgaria, who wore white overalls and stood next to the engine driver for hours on end, aflame with train lust; and Georges Nagelmackers, the indefatigable Belgian who founded La Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits (et des Grands Express Européens) at the age of twenty-seven. The trains running under that banner were majestic beasts, and some of the dominant predators are listed by Andrew Martin:

> In 1883, after negotiations with eight governments, Nagelmackers began running the Orient Express, which groped its way from Paris to Constantinople. In 1886 came the Calais-Mediterranée Express, forerunner of the famous Blue Train. In 1887 came the Sud Express (Paris-Madrid-Lisbon), and in 1890 the Rome Express (Calais-Rome), which went via the Mont Cenis Tunnel connecting France and Italy.

That epoch, restlessly opulent, has long since faded to a close, but no

matter. Blessed with a chronicler of consummate gifts, it survives and dazzles on the page:

> One night, during a trip abroad, in the fall of 1903, I recall kneeling on my (flattish) pillow at the window of a sleeping car (probably on the long-extinct Mediterranean Train de Luxe, the one whose six cars had the lower part of their body painted in umber and the panels in cream) and seeing with an inexplicable pang, a handful of fabulous lights that beckoned to me from a distant hillside.

That is Vladimir Nabokov, in "Speak, Memory." It couldn't be anyone else. His family, in pre-revolutionary Russia, caught trains as he did butterflies, and fled to the Crimea by railroad when Lenin came to power; Nabokov claims to have worn spats and a derby on board, as if refusing to be traumatized out of his elegance. The hillside lights of his childhood return with especial brilliance in "Glory," a novel too often overlooked. Its hero, Martin Edelweiss, spots a similar "necklace of lights," we are told, from his vantage point on a night train, in southern France. On a whim, he gets off at the next station, with the train "exhaling a sigh," and asks about the source of the illumination. Told that it is a village called Molignac, he walks up there, and spends a while toiling in the fields, before retracing his steps to the valley below and boarding the night express. He looks for his lights:

> Here they came, far away, spilled jewels in the blackness, unbelievably lovely—"Tell me," Martin asked the conductor, "Those lights there—that's Molignac, isn't it?" "What lights?" the man asked glancing at the window, but at this moment everything was shut out by the sudden rise of a dark bank. "In any case, it's not Molignac," said the conductor. "Molignac can't be seen from the railroad."

But why take a night train at all? Why not fly, drive, or apply to your nearest genie for a magic-carpet ride, preferably with a seat on the aisle? The best reason was supplied by my godfather, who was a military attaché in Moscow during the nineteen-eighties. If he wished to go to Leningrad by train, tickets would be issued to him *only* for travel at night. Daylight, which might have afforded a view of sensitive installations, was off limits.

Lesser mortals, with duller jobs, have three reasons to choose a sleeper train. The first of these is logistical. Say you work at the Stock Exchange in Milan. You have a meeting booked for Tuesday, September 8th, this year, in central Paris, at noon. (Because you are an optimist and a tough guy, and because you are currently hiding in your apartment, subsisting on macaroni from your pantry, and no longer able to take your shirts across town to be laundered by your ninety-year-old mother, you expect to remain virus-free.) You have a choice: air or rail? Air means an early start, with a taxi to Milan's Linate Airport, and the 08:25 Alitalia flight on Tuesday morning. Eighty-five dollars in coach, but, hey, someone else is paying, and the idea of being divided from the proletariat by a nylon curtain still gives you a weird kick, so a business seat it is. Three hundred and fifty bucks.

To go by rail, by contrast, involves dining at home, then catching the ten-past-eleven on Monday night, from Milan's central station. Again, your own space, with a sleeping compartment to yourself, will be expensive, at two hundred and seventy dollars. If you don't mind sharing with another man, however, the price plummets to ninety-three dollars. A steal. Unfortunately, you *do* mind, since that other man, in your shuddering imagination, is sure to be a catarrhal insomniac with complex gastric issues and featherlight fingers. A stealer.

So, in terms of cost, the plane and the train match up. The same goes for arrival times: 09:50 at Orly Airport, or thirteen minutes earlier at the Gare de Lyon, not far from the Place de la Bastille. And there's the rub. Most night trains insert you into the core of a city, whereas planes deposit you, at best, on the outer rind. A cab into Paris from Orly (or, more irritating still, from Charles de Gaulle Airport), at rush hour, is the antithesis of fun, and you may not fancy the schlep by public transport. Alight from the night train, though, and you will find *le Tout-Paris*, ready to greet you. Being in no hurry, you amble along the platform to breakfast in a restaurant so royally gilded, on the walls and ceilings, that the yolk of your poached egg will shine like the sun.

The second reason to travel by night train is *flygskam*. The word means "flight shame" in Swedish, and denotes the guilt that gnaws—or should rightfully gnaw—at your vitals when you realize that, by nipping from Berlin to Ibiza on EasyJet, say, for a skull-jolting weekend on the dance floor, you will, however indirectly, hasten the bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef. If you can spread the shame, forcing celebrities to charter their own yachts in a fit of conscience, so much the better. The vice of flying, thus exposed, has spawned a reciprocal virtue: *tågskryt*, or "train brag," as practiced by those who not only swap the skies for the railroad but, having made the sacrifice, go on Instagram and tell their friends about it.

The science is solid. If our Milanese broker flies to Paris (a distance of around four hundred miles), he will—not personally, of course, unless he asked for a second helping of osso buco the night before—release one hundred kilograms of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. That's not counting the taxi rides to Linate Airport at one end and from Orly at the other, probably in a fuming snarl of traffic. Should he go overnight by train, the journey will be more circuitous, and maybe thirty miles longer, but the CO_2 output will be under four kilos. That's quite a difference, and it's genuinely hard to spot a downside, unless it's the annoying halo of ethical self-satisfaction atop our traveller's head.

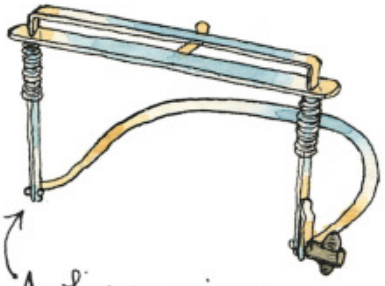
Will *flygskam* have any lasting effect on commercial enterprise? The signs are (or were, before the advent of COVID-19) distinctly promising. A new Nightjet train from Vienna to Brussels, established by Austrian Federal Railways, or Ö.B.B., and lauded by its C.E.O., Andreas Matthä, as "an eco-friendly travel option to the E.U. capital," had its inaugural run on January 19th. A serious journey, at just over fourteen hours. Ö.B.B. estimates that the rest of its night network has already saved the world twelve thousand short-haul flights a year: a delicious irony, given how greedily the budget airlines have eaten into train travel in recent decades. Further resurrections lie ahead, not least new sleeper services from Vienna and Munich to Amsterdam, slated for December of this year. One can but hope that such enviable schemes, intended to address the climate crisis, will not be stopped in their tracks by the rival plight through which we currently sweat.

The third reason to choose a sleeper train—and the most compelling—is no more practical than the taste of a

CONTEMPORARY LIFE HACKS

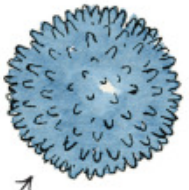
Punch holes around the perimeter of an umbrella

Attach a clear shower curtain and go out in public with a little less stress



A harmonica holder worn around your neck

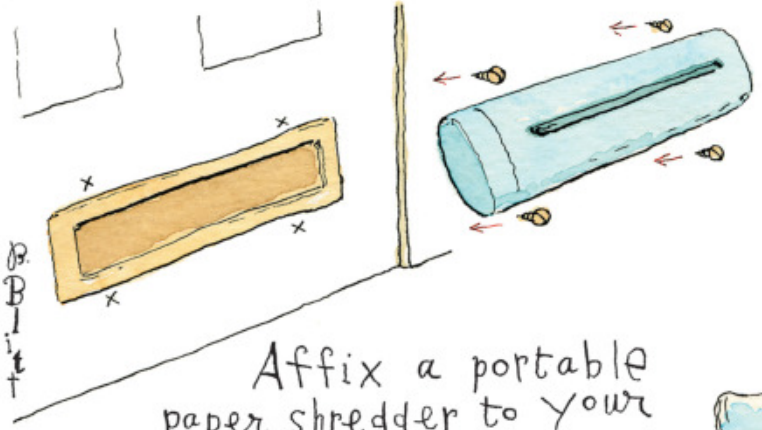
+



A mini massage ball

=

A hands-free face scratcher



Affix a portable paper shredder to your front-door mail slot (interior)

Place recycle bin below and never handle mail again

peach. At stake, you might say, is a sense of latent adventure. Although it is unlikely, as you clatter through the night, that anything of note will befall you, the prospect that it *could* feels ever present, just out of sight beyond the next curve of the track. To remain awake to that possibility, even as we're meant to be sleeping, is the privilege that beckons some of us back, year after year, to this awkward and beguiling locomotion.

No wonder trains and movies make such cozy bedfellows—so cozy that a train zipping through the darkness, with windows illuminated, actually *looks* like a strip of film. Plots, laid down on rails, dash ever onward; anticipation rises like steam. Consider Claudette Colbert, in "The Palm Beach Story," who falls in with the rowdy millionaires of the Ale and Quail Club. Sweeping her up as a mascot, and boarding the 11:58 from Penn Station with a pack of hounds, they think nothing of firing their shotguns at crackers, tossed up by a bar steward like clay pigeons. As for Hitchcock's "The Lady Vanishes," the lady in question is a grandmotherly secret agent, who, before she disappears, daubs her name on the misted window of the dining car. A ridiculous method, in any other time and place, of leaving your mark; on a night train, though, it seems only right and proper.

If you don't believe me, you have to believe Cary Grant. In "North by Northwest" (more Hitchcock), he boards the Twentieth Century, from New York to Chicago, without a ticket. By chance—or so he thinks—he meets Eva Marie Saint, first in the corridor and then in the dining car, where he orders a Gibson and, on her recommendation, the brook trout. The two of them return to her compartment, where, during a police inspection, she conceals Grant in the foldaway top bunk. Later, as daylight fails, they lean against the wall of the compartment and kiss, over and over, her hands caressing the back of his neck. "Beats flying, doesn't it?" he says to her. Sure does.

Sleeping on a sleeper is easier said than done. In "I Know Where I'm Going!," a magical film from 1945, the heroine, played by Wendy Hiller, caught the night train from Manchester to Glasgow, heading for her wedding in the Western Isles. And she definitely slept—lying in her compartment and dreaming of tartan-shrouded hills, as her bridal dress, hung on a rack, swayed with the motion of the train. But those dreams were bustling affairs, intercut with shots of pistons and wheels, and she arrived more panicked than refreshed. Thirty years later, in "Murder on the Orient Express," the same actress became a veiled and tremulous grande dame, plunging a blade into the murderee before the train was halted by snow. It's as if night trains, explicitly designed to aid slumber, implied too many other activities, beginning with love and death, to be truly soporific.

The ideal state, I would argue, is a delirious doze, peppered with fits and starts—the doze, for instance, of Anna Karenina, who gets a seat but no bed on her journey from Moscow to St. Petersburg. The snow outside is in tumult, but the compartment is heated by a stove: "She passed the paper-knife over the window pane, then laid its smooth, cool surface to her cheek." You can almost hear it hiss. Anna falls into a fevered reverie, from which she emerges only as the train pulls into a station. Such is the paradox that awaits the night-train novice: you sleep on the go, and you wake when you stop. (Anyone who has rocked a cradle will second this observation.) In the early pages of "Stamboul Train," whose narrative puffs from Ostend to Constantinople, Graham Greene points out this peculiar hiccup in the laws of physics: "In the rushing reverberating express, noise was so regular that it was the equivalent of silence, movement was so continuous that after a while the mind accepted it as stillness." Do the minds of sailors accommodate themselves, with equal ease, to a raging sea?

I first had a chance to test Greene's thesis on a pre-university pilgrimage from London to Athens, by rail, with a halfway break at Salzburg. Thereafter lay terra incognita, for the Communist bloc was still intact. I was travelling solo, in a couchette of six; my fellow-*coucheurs* were smugglers, brazenly lugging bags of Western luxuries—lipstick, nylons, and coffee—across the frontier into what was then Yugoslavia. I assumed that they had bribed the conductor, who padded up and down the car in socks, and left us largely alone. The date must have been mid-May, 1981, for an assassin had just tried to kill the Pope: an event of such weight that the smugglers and I, who shared no common language, reënacted the crime en route. (Surprisingly, they had no gun among them, so I was shot by a lit cigarette.) Having commandeered the upper berth, I lay there, reading "Wuthering Heights," drifting off,

"The people on the sidewalk look like angry ants who just had wine spilled on them."

and lurching awake, bereft of my bearings, whenever the train paused. I recall tugging the edge of the blind, peering out into first light, and seeing an old woman, quite still, with a bundle of sticks on her back. It was as if we had taken a branch line into the world of Brueghel.

How long it was before the weary train crawled into Larissa station, in Athens, I don't know. But the minutiae of those days and nights (insofar as I can tell them apart) are filed away forever in my brain. A journey by sleeper demands to be remembered, whereas an overnight flight is something you want to forget. Though the former may deposit you, benumbed, on a strange platform at a wretched hour, you somehow feel emboldened and ready to roll, whereas the latter leaves you curdled with misanthropy, watching everyone's luggage but yours go round and round on a joyless carrousel. Red-eye is so much worse than gray-face.

Last month, I found myself in Lisbon. It was Monday, March 9th. The coronavirus, busy with northern Italy, had yet to turn its attention to Portugal, and the capital was still well peopled. On the Praça do Comércio, a handsome square that flanks the north shore of the Tagus River, cafés were doing a brisk trade, though the clamor dipped as I walked northeast, into the small streets that wind and climb through the Alfama district. With the descent of dusk, my senses woke up. This would be my last chance to meander before the borders closed, and everything was heightened and charged. I smelled the orange trees beside the cathedral before I saw them, and the *vinho tinto* I drank at dinner had a potency greater than anything recorded on its label. Besides, I had a train to catch, to Madrid, and the inevitable broken night ahead, so the urge to fill up was not to be resisted. Roasted blood sausage in green wine? Bring it on.

The stroll from the Alfama to Santa Apolónia railroad station takes you past a museum devoted to fado, that noble strain of Portuguese song which, more closely than any other musical form, approximates the human sob. To be honest, I was convinced, on arriving at the station, that the employees had just come back from a three-hour fado rehearsal down the road. Never have I seen a sorrier crew. Wandering to and fro like unburied souls in the underworld, they wore the saddest uniform known to man: gray suit, gray shirt, gray tie, and gray *shoes*. I half expected them to leave a trail of ash. My fellow-passengers were few; one of them, laden with plastic bags, claimed to have been burgled before leaving her rental apartment, and asked to borrow twenty euros. The first thing that greeted me, as I boarded, was not a smiling steward but the lavish tang of drains. It was one of those nights.

We pulled away, and, as I stood at the door of my carriage, in fond valediction, something occurred to me: the door was open. The platform slid by, quickening, a single step away. Maybe this was company practice, assigning responsibility to customers. If so, what else were we bidden to do? Toot the whistle? Make the beds? In case there were children aboard, I swung the door shut. With a heavy clang, it locked; the handle snapped upward and struck my middle finger. I was bleeding under my nail, swearing like a stoker, and we hadn't even left the station. Who says that the romance of travel is dead?

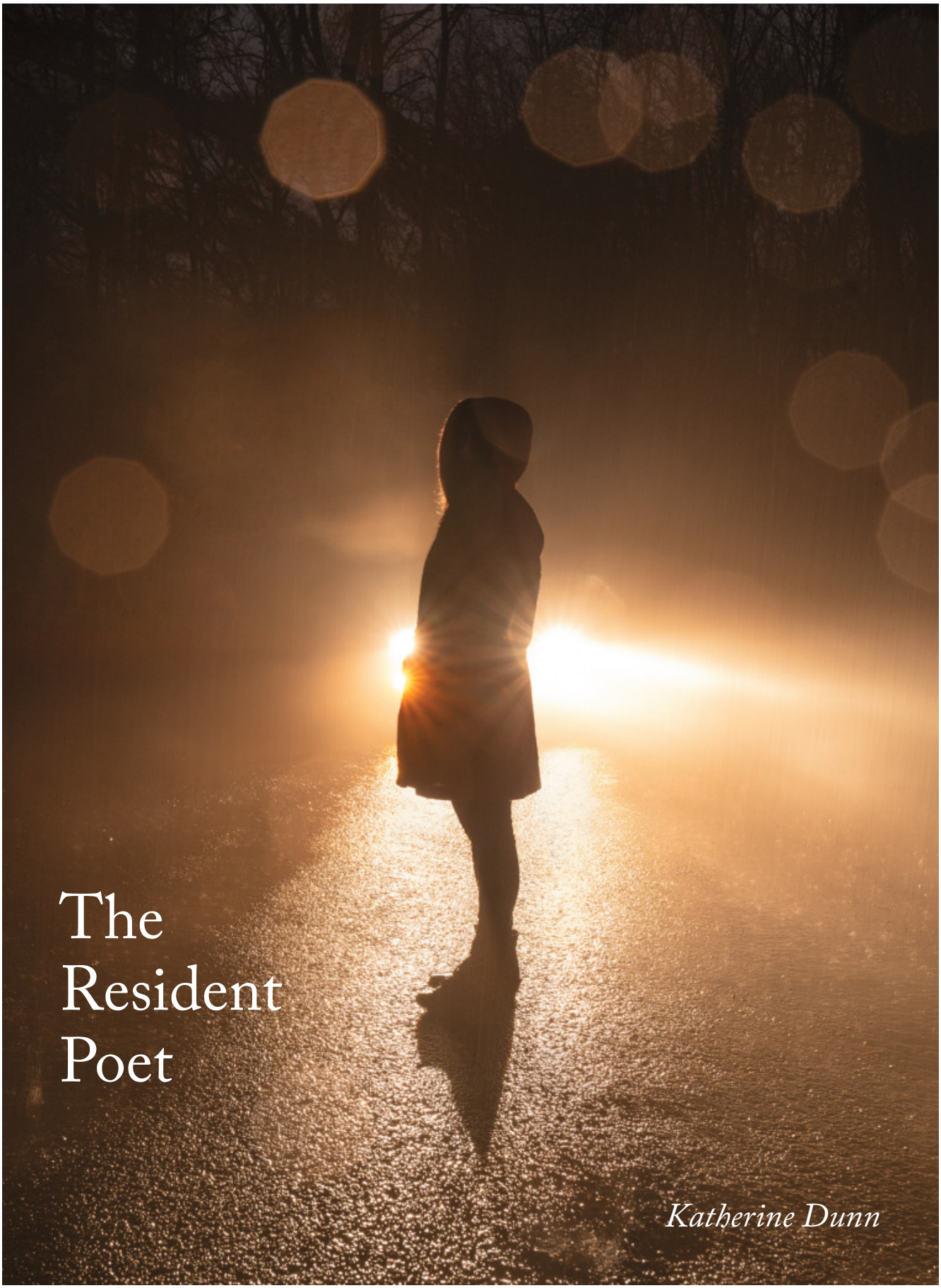
The ensuing night had not a shred of glamour. No snowdrift brought the engine to a halt. No spies, to my knowledge, were spirited on or off the train. No unnamed strangers accosted me, entrusted me with vital papers, or proposed a dry Martini. The sole occupants of the refreshment car were three of the gray men, and their mood bore no relation to that of the Ale and Quail. At half past six in the morning, tiptoeing to the far end of my carriage, I found another door open. It revealed the interior of a compartment, and there, on the bottom bunk, lay the conductor, fully dressed, face down. For a second, I'm sorry to say, I was disappointed not to see the richly inlaid hilt of a dagger protruding from between his shoulder blades. In truth, he was not murdered but merely napping, presumably having wept himself to sleep.

Such was the non-event of the journey. Yet I relished every mile of it, pulling wide the curtains at the witching hour, as I brushed my teeth, to disclose a vacant platform and the sign "Caxarias–Fátima" in a glowing haze; leaving them open as I lay on the bed, thus admitting the searchlight of the full moon; and, at last, stepping out into a Madrid morning as fresh as rising dough. At nine o'clock, on the south side of the Prado, beside the Botanical Garden, three or four citizens walked their dogs in the crisp air. An hour later, I entered the museum, and spent my final stretch of liberty, more or less alone, in the company of Titian and Veronese. A few days afterward, the global lockdown began.

None of us, even those who evade contagion, will be left unmarked by the ordeal. Lives that hang fire are hard to tend. My guess, for what it's worth, is that armchair travellers will manage better than most; railroad fanatics, their desktops thronged with timetables, are happy to plan elaborate itineraries that they know they may never pursue, across lands that they have no intention of visiting. I doubt whether I shall ever take the Andean Explorer, featuring "in-built oxygen for additional comfort at high altitudes," from Cusco to Puno, and get woken up, at sunrise, for a bleary squint at Lake Titicaca.

I *do* mean to make for Sweden, though, once the viral fog has lifted, and to voyage from toe to top—from Malmö, in the south, up to Narvik, just over the Norwegian frontier, and well within the Arctic Circle. Or how about Belgrade to Bar, on the Montenegrin coast, rumored to be one of the most beautiful of overnight rides? Twenty-six dollars one way, plus seven for a couchette. Beauty comes cheap, and, in the lighter months, it will reveal itself with the dawning of the day.

A suggestion, then, for your compulsory hours of leisure: pick a landmass, get hold of a map, run your finger along the healed scars of the railroad lines, locate the stations, and start to plot. The necklace of lights is out there, somewhere, wrapped in the velvet of the dark. You may never find them; you may miss them entirely, glancing up too late from the window of your train; you may sleep through them, soothed by the loud lullaby of the wheels. But the hunt for the jewels is endless, and priceless, and the night, your co-conspirator, is here to help. ♦



The Resident Poet

Katherine Dunn

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVA O'LEARY

At his request, I am hiding in the parking lot. Every time lights show on the road, I jump behind a tree or crouch beside one of the cold parked cars. I don't really care whether I'm seen or not, but I do plan to emerge mysteriously when he drives up. Impress him with my discretion, my knowledge of the surreptitious. But the rain is ruining the effect. I'm beginning to get angry. Who does he think would see us? Or care? I consider going back to my room and making a sign to hold up at passing cars: "I AM WAITING TO SCREW MR. LUCAS, THE RESIDENT POET!"

My mascara is running into the pouches beneath my eyes. I can feel the thin mud of powder on my forehead and cheeks beginning to slide.

The lights from the dormitories and the dining hall glow on the hill. No shapes around them, only blackness, and the moonless dark on me and around me. Another car turns off the main road. I stand behind a tree until it disappears up the long driveway to the college. I forgot to ask what kind of car he drives.

The spy game palls. I huddle under the tree and wish myself back in bed with a book and an inexhaustible supply of cigarettes. The image of my cozy self in a soft puddle of smoky lamplight grieves me.

I could have picked a less paranoid professor. But would that professor have picked me? Fortunately, the resident poet feels duty bound to fondle the freshmen, and I'm the only dope so far who has been susceptible to his paunch and poetry. And he's the only dope susceptible to me. Unless he chickens out and I'm left soaking all night. If he's not here when the moon comes up, I decide, I'm going in.

Light from the road, turning. A puttering of syncopated pistons. An old Volkswagen gasping and shaking into the lot. The headlights beam in odd directions, and eyeglasses shine through the dim windshield. I slide out from under the tree and squelch suavely toward the car. His face, gray and anxious, dips a smile at me. I get in on the passenger side, bringing the wetness in with me. Slam the door. He wheels the car around and rips out of the lot, down the driveway, and onto the road without looking at me.

When I first met him, I thought he looked like Ulysses S. Grant. All that curly black hair and curly black beard, the thick pink lips and square forehead. The more I see of him, the truer the resemblance seems. The light from the street lamps is slashed by the rain and ripples over his face. The spreading veins across his cheeks, the odd pits in the skin of his nose, the watery blue eyes, the secret weakness of his chin. He crops his beard so that it juts, instead of sliding toward his Adam's apple along with his chin. His worries are bunched in lumps all over his forehead. At a stoplight, he gives me a quick, constipated grin.

"Nobody saw you?" His face turns back to the street, but I can see his eyes sliding at me in jerks, waiting for my answer.

"Only the fire department and your wife's mother."

His chuckle is a long time coming. His pudgy knuckles are pale green in the moving light.

"Would you mind crouching down in your seat until we get out of town?"

His apologetic teeth. The rasp in my breath. I drop onto the floor and prop my chin on the seat. Try to keep my wet boots from touching my ass. There are strange drafts down here, whispering through the framework, jets of cold squirting me in the back and the hair.

He looks very large. His stodgy shoes pump and move over the pedals at the end of his reliable wool legs. The gray cloth swags over his belly, droops from his arms.

"Do you think I'm crazy?" he says.

His fat lips. The pleading eyes. He'd rather be home in bed with his soft wife and a bottle of beer. I tip my head so that he can see my smile in the dark beneath the dashboard.

"Of course, you're a lunatic."

He is pleased. It's so important to be crazy if you're a poet. He reaches into his breast pocket. "I got something for you."

A package of little cigars.

"Don't these bother you? Your asthma? I wasn't going to smoke at all." I have prepared to be vicious for two days.

"No. I don't mind cigar smoke. I can smoke these myself. It's just cigarettes that make me choke."

In his class, we sit with all the windows open, the rain blowing in. We don't take off our coats. He always wears the same suit. It looks as though he's stored potatoes in the pockets for a few seasons. The same plaid flannel shirts over improbable layers of underwear, or maybe that softness is his flesh welling up beneath the cloth. The clashing plaid tie is always just enough askew to allow his wiry chest hair to peep through at the collar.

"Have you eaten dinner? I haven't. How about a hamburger?"

"Great!" I chirp.

Throw a few volts into the smile, a few more than usual, actually, because of the dark beneath the dashboard. The car wheezes to a stop. He removes the key and looks around, his eyes reflecting light. Then he smiles down at me and slips out. He leans in for a moment before swinging the door closed.

"Keep hidden just a little while longer. A lot of the students come here."

His anxious face is gone with a flash of spectacles. I lift my head above the level of the window and watch his broken-butt trot across the shining tar. The big neon mouth on the sign prepares to chomp down on a seductively plump olive with an obscenely oriented pimento. He's left me at the dark end of the parking area. Am I really going to wallow and stroke and gurgle and sigh over this character? Yes. What dull stuff I get into for the sake of excitement. I can see him through the café window as he casts furtive glances at the ragtag collection of customers, muttering his order at the waitress so that no potential blackmailers or squealers can hear him ask for two coffees and two hamburgers and two orders of French fries.

By the time he gets back to the car, I'm giggling. He hands me the lidded coffees. I balance them above the seat as he pulls out.

"I'm sorry about all this. You can get up now."

My ass is numb and my legs ache. The chill has penetrated to my kidneys and set off a reaction. I pull myself onto the seat and open the coffee. Rest the cups on the gyrating dash. Rip open the hot, greasy paper around the food.

"I hope you like onions."

"What did you tell your wife?"

Hand him a hamburger, smear a

capsule of ketchup on the potatoes. He chomps and chews. "A weekend conference with a publisher."

The darkness moves and pales and disappears into more darkness. No cars. No lights. The gray road spinning beneath us. The headlights catch momentary shapes. I won't ask whether she believed him. That would open up too many nasties. Either he'd be smug and say he didn't care or he'd tell me all about her.

The river is dead gray beside us. A small hard light shows briefly on the other side. Better be poetic for him. Get him off the thought of repercussions.

"I came down here often last summer to fish," I said. "I'd bring canned corn and fish for carp there by the flour mills early in the morning. The dawn would break and soften all the docks and bridges, soak everything in lavender light. Then I'd pull the big gold fish out of the purple water and the scales would come off in my fingernails like gold dust."

I look at the river and sense him smiling.

"You really should write poetry," he says.

He dives a hand blindly for the French fries and stuffs them into his mouth. Wipes the grease on the wool of his pants and reaches for the coffee. I look over at him as though mildly surprised. I take a contemplative bite of burger and chew until the dangling tomato makes it into my mouth.

"Oh, I think poetry takes different kinds of feelings than the set I've got."

It's a walk-in line for him. He fastens on a puffy grin and slips it to me with a standard nonchalant wag of his head.

"A poet," he says. He does the sonorous levity so obviously. We are all such bad actors. "A poet is a man who runs out naked into every thunderstorm, hoping to be struck by lightning."

He pushes hamburger into his mouth and juts his bulging cheek at me. Very cocky. Quotable-quotes time. The rain sprawls. There are no drops, only the constant moving sheet of water and, in front of the headlights, a fall of needles. My turn now. He waits and chews.

"I guess that makes me this week's thunderstorm."

"No, my dear, the lightning. The lightning."

I was too predictable. He was ready for that one. I look at him. He looks at me. Gives an intense smile meant to convince me of my electrical qualities.

I could never be a professional whore. Not for long. It would be such hard work. Though the money might make it more interesting. It's enough for the average lifetime to break one man in, to set up your chosen demeanor, trace his susceptibilities, and analyze his tricks, but to have to go through that time after time—feeling around for soft spots, carefully pinpointing the vanities, milking and teasing—hundreds or thousands of times? And not to be able to choose? Not that I have much choice as it is. My pay is eked out in bad hamburgers and cheap motel weekends, but at least I can go home and recuperate before my restlessness drives me out to work again.

But it's all right now. With every mile, he gets some of his juices back, thinks less about getting caught and more about what he fancies.

His hand slides onto my knee and squeezes. I slip an arm over the back of the seat and run my fingers through his hair. It feels like a piece of cheap upholstery.

"You must be tired," I say. "You'll be exhausted by the time we get to the coast."

I feel the lumps of bone behind his ears.

"No," he says. "I'm on fire."

Poor fellow, trying to work himself up. He pulls my hand onto his thigh. It's true, I have always had a weakness for the delicacy of thighs. Like the inner legs of horses, the incredible softness of a dog on its back, baring belly and balls to signal submission. But there must be some form for the delicacy to rest on. This thigh is pudding. A pudding with a bone in it. The spoon, perhaps.

He shifts gears to make a turn. We're climbing now. The river is gone. Hills and trees. Isolated gas stations in painful light. His hand drops back onto my hand and tugs it toward his crotch. Don't tell me. Are we really going to have to do this? With another full hour's drive ahead of us?

I rummage dutifully in the wool-covered pudding. His belly is in the way. Where is the thing? Buttons and zipper and wool over pudding. The hand on my hand lifts and encircles my head, reaches around and tries to draw me down. Has he fantasized about this? Or does he just think it's a necessary part of the program? He has to let go of my head to shift again. The car is careening over the narrow road, which looks white in the lights. His hand comes back up to pull my head down. If I have to lean over the gearshift to blow him, it's going to be miserable, all cramped. I'd have to do it sideways and would probably get a stitch. And what would I do with my right arm? Shove it down between the seats? No. I'll wait until the motel. He's already used up all the discomfort he bought with one hamburger. I give him a soft laugh. A nuzzle on the ear to take the sting out of the shrug. He has thick hair in his ears.

"Let's wait. If we hit a bump, I'll bite it off."

His sharp laugh is almost natural with surprise. He narrows his eyes at the road. He'll have to sulk over that a bit. I give his pudding a last friendly pat and relax back into my seat. Rip open the package of cigars. Sniff audibly at the plastic bits so he won't think I'm taken in by their quality.

"Would you like one?"

He gives me a resigned smile. "Yes. Might as well."

I light them for both of us. The searing stench hits my nose before I can fill my lungs. I cough. Once I'm full of the smell I don't notice it. He holds his like a pencil and nips daintily at the smoke, filling his mouth then puffing it out.

"Why do you suppose cigars don't irritate your asthma?"

All is good again. He tells me at length how his asthma is a purely psychological condition that began spontaneously when, at twenty-six, he read his first article on air pollution, in the waiting room of the hospital where his mother was dying of cervical cancer.

So he is relieved, too; he didn't

really want me to suck his cock while he was shifting gears and pumping pedals and steering an egg box down a wet road in the middle of the night after working all day and conniving against his wife and palpitating over possible discovery and probably not even having a bath.

Now that I think of it, that was the first time we've touched each other. It's been strictly verbal flirtation, primarily, I assume, because neither of us finds the other attractive. We are here in obedience to our separate principles.

He, having been married twice and published a book of poems, having grown his beard and refused to mow his lawn, having succeeded in transforming a page of liberal newsprint into a chronic ailment, having assumed all these forms and wandered hatless in the rain hoping to be recognized and told who he is, must continue the outline he is sketching for himself, complete the design.

And I, Sally, having been mooed at by my peers, having skulked against walls and sat up nights searching through the *Reader's Digest* for jokes to insert into the conversations of the following day, having been for too long involuntarily good, have tapped into unsuspected energies in my current project. I have worked my way through reluctant soda jerks, potential painters, a good pianist who is studying to become a bad psychologist, a travelling daffodil salesman, and now, here, tonight, I have searched for, if not precisely located, the cock of the resident poet. Maybe he'll write a poem about me, or give me a passing grade in English. The painters did portraits of me, though they were just pastel sketches, convenient for one-night stands. I filed them in the left-hand drawer of my desk, separated by tissue paper. The pianist, a virgin until he appealed to me, wrote a tune and played it for me in the chapel. A bad poem would fit into the collection nicely.

The motel surrounds a courtyard. Mr. Lucas goes into the office and registers and races out with the key, for fear the manager will want to show the room to us. There is no crash of surf. The ocean is purported to be out there, somewhere. We run through the rain. I have my big purse. He has a flight bag. The room is a suite, cheap at the off-season rate. A sitting room, a bedroom, a kitchenette, and a bathroom, all clean. Only the air is moldy. I shut myself in the bathroom and scrub my face, brush the stiffness out of my dried hair, smear black around my eyes. My face is puffy, pale, with freckles standing out like the heads of pins. An actual flutter now in my belly. How do you go about this? What do you do when there's no impulse to guide you? I've let this get too cold and distant, but I must strut out to meet it.

He's sprawled on the sofa with his shoes and jacket off. A bottle of whiskey at his elbow, a glass of the slippery fluid rocking in his hand. I've never seen him without his coat on before. He looks fatter, unhealthy. I ought to curl up beside him and start petting and tickling. I sit down on the rug near his feet and lean back against his legs. Cheery faces on the television screen. I should be up on the couch soothing this soft fellow. His knees are more thickly padded than mine. The smell of his wet wool. I take off my boots and lift a foot to sniff at it. It hasn't begun to stink yet. His hand touches my neck. He could, after all this sneaking around, just as easily kill me as screw me.

"Take off your clothes."

His voice is commanding now. The game officially begins. I stand up and pull my jumper off over my head. Stand looking away from him in black tights and a black jersey. More shy than I can remember. This must not be the way. A coldness in my belly. One deep breath and I cuddle in beside him and reach for his glass. Feel the neat spirit falling into me without effect.

"You're even prettier than I had imagined."

That means he didn't think I had

"I could probably keep spring-cleaning till next winter."

any waist at all. I am tired. Too tired to pretend well. I run my hands over his chest and inside his buttons.

When the glass is empty, we slug on the bottle. After a while, we go into the bedroom and take off the rest of our clothes. I have a kind of shock then. He isn't circumcised. He has a big hairy belly and droopy hairy thighs and this soft little mush of a bag instead of a prick. I've never realized the difference that circumcision makes. It slides around easily in my hand. I can't get a grip on it. He never does get very hard. I don't know which one of us is to blame for that. We hump around on the bed, working. He's heavy on me. I can't breathe very well and gasp realistically. I'd describe it all, but it's just a pain. A drab fumbling like nothing so much as a poorly cooked meal that is so ostentatiously served that the diners are obliged to comment and erupt periodically with overenthusiastic "Oh, my"s and "Wonderful"s.

When he's done, I make a mistake. I am puffing and sweating, from lack of oxygen. I'm bored and tired and wishing myself back in my sober little bed. I let a few tears leak out. He leans over me and stares.

"What's the matter?"

He looks almost scared. I need a quick reply. That's the only excuse I can give for what comes next. I am too lazy and tired to come up with an appropriate one, so I use the line I use for young men who lack confidence. I say, "I guess you're the first man. I guess I've only been with boys before." A dumb line, but no worse than most of the things said over toast or tea. It all serves to grease the wheels and keep the machine rolling along. But it isn't the right line for this man. I admit it.

He pulls away from me, winded, his cheeks flushed. He crawls up to the pillow and looks at me. My first clear view of him. His breasts hang. A lot of hair on his colorless skin. He's looking smug now.

"That's weird. I thought you were very experienced and were going to teach me wild things."

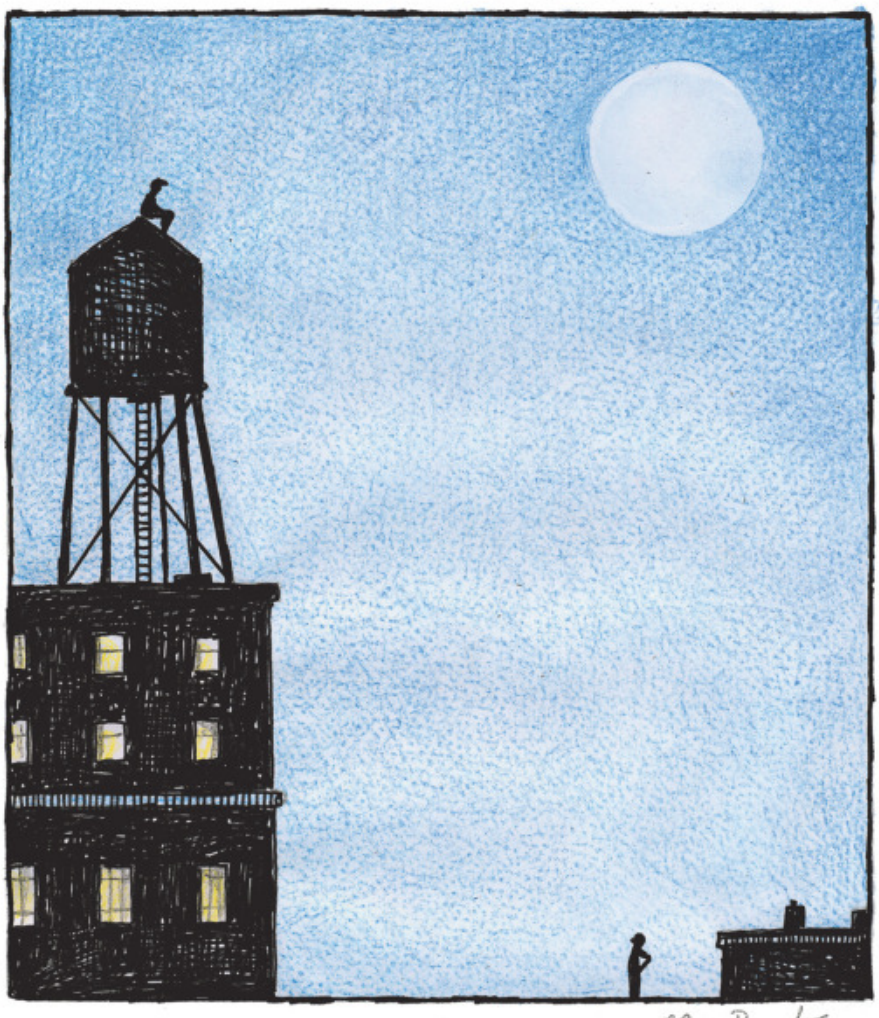
My understanding comes suddenly. Lying there with scum bubbling on my thighs, looking at the foam on his wrinkled little prick, and watching his big belly heave upward until his navel threatens to pop out. His suddenly twinkling eyes, weak, squinting at me without their lenses. I remember that look from his class, when he thinks he knows something we don't. When someone says something particularly stupid, the "Ah, but consider this, my young friend" look. Quite clearly and for the first time, I see that he has been toadying up to me. He's been afraid of me, but now he'll expect me to play up to him, to fawn and fondle. The fat smile in his beard. I can feel myself staring too long at him. The cluck believed me. Better he should have been angry at my using such an old line on him. I roll over and go into the bathroom.

While the tub is running, I go out to the living room and get a cigar. He is dipping a toe into the water when I get back. His feet are fat, nearly square, with a thick pad on the sole and a layer of softness moving smoothly over the bones of the arch. No depressions, just a varicose vein running up the inside of one plump calf. He sits down at the back of the tub and leaves me the faucets to lean against. The white water and white skin and white tub all glare at me. I wrap a towel around my hair, climb in, and lean my head back, trying not to show that I've got two chrome knobs jabbing me in the spine. I draw deeply on the cigar, regard him through half-closed eyes.

My feet are fat, too. My navel waves up and down beneath the water. He's got the whiskey bottle.

"Have you ever gone with girls?" he says.

I have to catch my eyelids to keep them from narrowing. "Why?"



"That would make you come." His complacence is more nauseating than his weakness. I may begin to dislike him. "That was what made me notice you at first. I saw how that pasty-faced blond girl in class had such a passion for you."

"Pasty-faced?"

"After the first week or so, she started wearing her hair like yours, and she got big earrings. She started putting on mascara and came to class in leotards instead of lumberjack shirts."

"Hmm."

I hadn't noticed that. She invited me to her room once for a kind of prissy tea. She talked about absolute truth and beauty while I ate cake. Another long pull at the cigar while he tugs at the bottle. His navel rises above the water, smiles toothlessly, and sinks again.

"Don't tell me you've never had thoughts about your roommate."

"Fern?"

"She's so big and fabulous. A mythic female. Legs and arms as big as a tall man. You'd climb her like a tree."

This is no time for careless reactions; I've lost enough ground that way. Draw deeply on the cigar, expand the nostrils to take in oxygen, reach slowly over the side of the tub to flick ash into the toilet. Another puff of smoke to fill the space between us. His head is five feet away from mine at the other end of the tub, and our legs and torsos tangle and float in between. He nips at the bottle and wipes his mouth with a wet hand.

"Didn't you ever go that way at pajama parties?"

The phrase dispels the sinister tension I'd been feeling. It is, after all, only the opening gambit of Lecture No. 10 in the Young Men's Arsenal Series: "Sexual Mores Are a Hypocritical Bourgeois Plot," to be delivered to tight-assed young ladies over hamburgers, stick shifts, or the second drink of any given evening.

And so I sit in the scummy water, smoking and watching his eyes get brighter and smaller as he drinks. He thinks he made me have an orgasm and now he can do whatever he wants with me. Yes.

I can see him in his tub at home, his underpants in a puddle beneath the sink. "For Christ's sake, where's the soap?" he shrieks, and gets up to shut the door on his three-year-old daughter so she can no longer fill paper cups with water from the toilet and pour them over his head. And I can see him as an old man, lying back against pillows while his wife, thicker now and even more tired, works at him abstractly until he finally pushes her away in anger and dreams of young girls with taut skin who could get him up with just a smile. The same old man, his breasts closer than ever to that navel, hikes his pants up over his belly and asks his wife to bring coffee to the guests so that he can be wise and hospitable in his own house. He will invite young poets to sit at his feet and hear the flitting tones of unrecognized genius. He'll do it badly and only the fools will be fooled. We smart-asses will just pretend to be fooled because doing so fits in with some performance of our own.

"I'm thinking about what you're saying. Go ahead," I say.

The white light bouncing off the tub does nothing for the splotches on his cheeks. He draws on his bottle and I draw on my cigar. He slides his foot into my crotch and wiggles it a little. His toes are wrinkled from soaking so long.

"It just amazes me that all you females in that dormitory together watching one another dress and shower and sleep could possibly resist the beauty of girl flesh. Imagine all those nubile bodies with their tousled hair lying in their little beds in their separate little cubbyholes, masturbating when they could be enjoying one another." His smacking lips. This must be a real fantasy. He's too drunk for duty dreams.

"That's funny," I drawl. Tip my head back so I can look at him through slits. "Male homosexuality has always seemed so totally comprehensible to me. Those hairy young thighs in the locker room. The tender napes of powerful necks, snug little asses, and . . ."

His frown is thick and heavy. His face flushing out of the beard.

"Don't be such a silly shit. I'm trying to open you up to a new dimension in yourself. An unused awareness."

He's too anxious, a little scary. I sit up to get my crotch out from under his unfriendly foot.

"What is it that you're thinking about?" I say it easily, just curiosity, screen out the anger.

His flabby grin. "I could help you to appreciate women." He watches for my reaction.

"Oh! You mean a three-way thing! Me and another girl and you? Why all the beating around the bush about it? That's no big deal." Squelch him a bit. Nothing quite like having your wildest fantasies belittled as tame.

"I just wouldn't want it unless you really wanted it." He smirks.

I stand up and reach for a towel. I am too sleepy to go on with this, but I am relieved to find that it wasn't anything spooky after all, just old Phase 3 of Line 2:

> Line 2:
> Phase 1—If you don't fuck me, you are a narrow-minded bourgeois pig.
> Phase 2—If you don't let me fuck you up the ass, you are a narrow-minded bourgeois pig.
> Phase 3—If you don't get your best friend into bed with us, you are a narrow-minded, etc.

He pads, dripping, into the bedroom after me. He looks worse standing up because the chub droops. He's patting himself contentedly with a towel. That classic gesture of drying the chest hair, the circular rubbing of the space between the nipples. Athenian boys must have done that after their baths, the farmer swabbing himself at the trough, and the Aborigine wet from a river—all with that same tender massaging of the sternum. It occurs to me to laugh. I have an urge to ask him what makes him think he could possibly handle two women. But, of course, he doesn't really think so, any more than I think I'm the siren of the faculty lounge. It's just pretend.

I don't even try to be graceful climbing into the cold bed. He's too busy admiring himself with the towel to notice, anyway. Could he possibly feel that he's been a success tonight? Maybe I should mention his wife to make him nervous again. He flings the towel onto the floor and jumps in beside me. He probably has to hang up his towels at home. Or maybe she does things like that for him. His warm podge reaching for me. A spoony cuddle. One plump

arm gropes for the lamp and shuts us off together in the dark.

"What do you think of that idea? The thing with the other female?" His voice is eager, boyish.

"Sure," I say. "Anytime you can arrange it."

He hugs me close and says, "That's the girl."

Just before sleep, I think about why he can't make a proposition like that to his wife. I'm feeling pretty sorry for myself, anyway. I don't care. I'm incapable of being insulted. I haven't loved anybody since the first juicy spurt of youth, and I've more or less decided that even that was merely a successful sales campaign conducted by dealers in jukebox records and mouthwash. Nobody can hurt me. I might get tired, or bored, but I can't be hurt the way a wife could. All this is just dirty talk to me, exotic entertainments for the unloved and unloving. And that is the nice tight thought that I warm my soggy innards with before sleep.

I wake displeased to find him there beside me. After a night like that, I prefer to be alone to wash myself and read, to smoke in a corner and review the angles of the conversation. But his belly and breasts are pressed against my back, and his soft arm loops over my shoulder. Trying to slip out to pee, I wake him. His groggy clutches tighten and he pulls me back. The urgency of a full bladder is a fair imitation of lust. We maul each other pretty fiercely for a while. I rush the business and then hurry to the bathroom. I spend some time putting myself back together again before going out.

He's still lying on the pillows. Still smug. With his bacchanalian grin on. I should ask him for money. That would bring him down to a manageable level. I could reveal the whole thing as a hustler's technique and relieve myself of the orgasm faux pas of the night before. But I'm a coward. Ask him for breakfast instead. Nibble his toes by way of demonstration.

"I'm hungry!"

He wants to drive up the coast to see a historic mansion, so we check out of the motel and get in the car and go looking for a diner. His skin is shabbier in the daylight. The radiating lines around his eyes are from years of forced smiles. I feel relaxed around him now. I don't care much what he thinks of me.

We stop at a café perched over a fishing pier and take a booth surrounded by powerful old men who have just come in after a predawn trip to sea. Their clothes are damp, and they are eating voluminously and talking happily to one another and to the crisp-curled woman who waits on them. They seem honest next to Mr. Lucas.

He hunches in the booth with his shoulders up, suddenly terrified again of meeting someone he knows. He orders coffee and a roll of antacid tablets. I order most of the menu enthusiastically, for spite. We sit in silence, watching and listening to the other customers, feeling the spray in the wind when someone opens the door. He leans toward me and mutters conspiratorially, "This is the blind core of the continent. The heart of darkness!"

The waitress brings his coffee and the tablets in one hand and my pancakes and eggs and maple syrup with a side order of sausage on the other arm. The smell and sight of the food obviously upsets him.

"I suppose you're going to have a cigar after all that?"

I grin at him, pour syrup over everything, and begin to tuck in. He chews morosely on his Tums and turns the other way. The more I look at the aged fishermen, the more I wonder

how many of them have managed to sneak away for how many weekends with girls they didn't like.

We drive up the coast and check into an old clapboard hotel with bright, oddly shaped rooms and shining brass beds. We wash and then go down in the ornate elevator. The girl running the elevator stares at my eye makeup and his beard and asks us if we're with a rock band.

"Sure," he says, delighted.

"Peaches and the Cream," I say. "Catch us at the Big Dipper."

"Where's that?" she asks, but we are already floating through the lobby, buoyed on the flattery of her mistake. It made us both feel good. He takes my arm as we walk up the hill toward the mansion. He even stops in a drugstore to buy me another box of little cigars.

The caretakers live in the basement of the house. They are old and suspicious, gray and proud. The woman begins dusting the moment we arrive. The man stands guard at the foot of the main staircase as we prowl through the rooms. Dark furniture, cups and spoons that haven't touched lips for a hundred years. A plaque on the beam of the back porch identifies the spot where the missionary was hanged by his recalcitrant flock. We giggle our way past the caretaker and up the stairs. The bedrooms are cold, the furniture standing around the walls in great black chunks.

"I like this room!" Mr. Lucas says. "I could write great poetry in a room like this."

He moves to the marble sink in the corner and tries the tap. While the water runs, he undoes his fly.

"Keep an eye out for the old man," he says, winking.

I turn my back and watch him in the standing mirror between the windows. He stands on tiptoe, hauls up his dowdy little pecker, and pisses darkly into the stream from the faucet.

"At least once in every man's life he should piss in a sink," he says. He zips himself in and we go stolidly downstairs and thank the caretaker for letting us examine the house.

"It's been wonderfully kept up," Mr. Lucas says.

"Yes," the old man says, his turtle face never shifting its planes or relenting in its suspicion that we are walking out with something under our coats.

Mr. Lucas yawns. "Me for a nap," he says.

"A nap?"

"I'm an old man, you must remember."

So we walk back to the hotel. He lies on the high brass bed and punches a hole in the pillow for his head. I don't like to watch him sleep. To see the feeble jointure of his hip and his paunch. To see his chubby little feet in their thin socks peeping out from his baggy

pants legs or his frail, breaking shoes lying beneath the bed. He doesn't snore. But his face brings children to my mind, and the sadness of seeing the fresh flesh that ends in drool and rot. I never like to watch people sleep. They are so whole and vulnerable. It's impossible to hate them when they sleep, but seeing the body unconscious, seeing the balls of intention hidden by their eyelids and the wit and the weakness gone from their faces, is frightening. It makes me think of death.

I take a cigar and sit on the deep windowsill looking out on the only street of the town. I watch ladies shopping and two busy dogs by the door of the bait cutter's across the way. Telling myself I'll get a good grade out of this at least, and dreaming of my small room in the dormitory, its private bed and books and door.

I shall read the Greeks when I get back, I resolve. Picture long evenings in the warmth of the lamplight with the frenzy of the weather shut out and even the voices in the hallway beyond my attention. I won't be driven out into the dark searching for excitement anymore. I shall look it in the face this time. Look the end in the face.

But I look at Mr. Lucas on the bed and see that he is afraid, too. That, with all the years ahead of me, I needn't expect to find answers or peace before he does.

His eyes open then. He feels around for his glasses and puts them on. He smiles at me and pats the bed beside him. I stub out my cigar and go and crawl up next to him. Put my hand on his chest and he puts his gawpy arms around me and says, "Don't look so sad, Sally." And I take the comfort of his warm flesh and cuddle it to me, fearing all the while that he'll think we ought to screw, but he doesn't.

We drive down to the J. C. Penney's because he wants to get a present for his little girl. I stand around while he paws through the kiddie clothes anxiously and comes up with a red sailor dress.

"What do you think of this one?" he keeps asking.

"I don't know anything about it," I say.

I wonder if his pregnant wife has gone through eight years of mauling and got knocked up twice without ever having an orgasm. She must masturbate while he's in the bathroom, I think. Or maybe she takes lovers. I almost say that to him, but he is talking seriously to the saleslady about children's sizes, so I wait.

He puts the box in the back seat, and we ride down the coast looking for a place that serves drinks and dinner. Dusk is falling now, the gray day sneaking out, when we pass a laundromat. It stands all by itself on the road outside the town. Rough beach grass hisses against the cinder blocks of the building, and its one big window looks across the road to the marsh that leads to the sea. We aren't going very fast. The white light inside glares over the rows of green machines and a solitary figure, with her arms outstretched, folding towels into a white plastic basket. Her curlers are like a pink halo around a plump face; she wears a pale fuzzy sweater, tight pants stretched over generous haunches. Then we're past but the car is slowing. He pulls to the side of the road and stops. With the motor idling, the heater works better. He hunches over the wheel and turns his face to me.

"Did you see that?"

"The girl?"

"A simple little housewife," he says. "Her husband probably works the swing shift and she waits to do the laundry until he's gone to work. We go in and start a conversation with her, take her out for a drink, and then get her to the hotel room with us."

His tense voice settles a bleak winter on my chest. Bitter winds are moving through my lungs. The marsh is spread out there with the gulls weaving black against the sky. The sheen of the shredded water fills me, and I am tired, tired.

"I've been thinking about it. It really might work." His intensity irritates me

"Huh. According to this, I've logged more screen hours than actually exist in a day."

• •

unreasonably. "With a couple," he says, "she wouldn't be scared off. Women are never afraid of a man if he's with another woman. They figure she acts as a wall governing the limits to which anything can be carried."

His glasses gleam in the last light. Do we really have to play this through? I don't want to do this. Should I want to? Does it demean my intellect not to want to? Does it show my spirit to be small and dependent if I don't want to? I don't want to do this.

"She wouldn't want to go out drinking," I sneer. "She's got her hair in curlers. It would just be a useless hassle. Women like that never feel sexy until they've got their hair combed out and their makeup on."

"But don't you see? She'd never suspect. Because she isn't feeling sexy she'd never think we were approaching her on that basis. A smart girl like you could talk her around easily. Let's just go back and look. Do you want to?"

My eyes pour themselves out into the darkening marsh. I won't look at him anymore.

"All right," I say.

He puts the car into gear and swings it around. We pull up on the gravel in front of the laundromat and he kills the engine.

Her pink sponge helmet glows in the fluorescent light. She's sitting on one of the machines now, leaning over a magazine. Her pants stop six inches from her ankles, and her feet are rubbing each other in their gaping shoes.

"She's got enormous tits," he says. He's hugging the steering wheel and squinting through his glasses at her.

"Also gut and butt," I mutter.

"What?" He turns to me.

"I say she's fat. She's got a belly like a garbage bag and an ass like the truck to carry it."

His hand waves through the window.

"She's a Titan! Look at that skin. I've never screwed a woman in curlers before. All these liberated females with their straight hair."

Is screwing two people you don't like innately more pleasurable than screwing one person you don't like?

The girl on the jiggling washing machine turns a page in her magazine and reaches into her purse for a cigarette. She jabs it into her mouth and fumbles around for matches before she can light it. She goes on reading. She holds her cigarette like an old-time movie queen, sucks at it, and blows the smoke out through her nose without inhaling.

The daylight is nearly gone. Headlights whip over us and come to a stop staring at the laundromat door. A fat old lady in a boxy tweed coat climbs out of a station wagon and paces into the building. The girl on the washing machine looks up and blows out smoke and begins to talk. The older woman retrieves the plastic basket of clothes. The girl hops down and opens the machine she's been sitting on, starts hauling out clean sheets in gray armloads. She plops them into a cardboard box, swings her purse strap over her shoulder, and hoists the box onto her hip.

The two women move out of the lighted doorway to the car. The doors slam. The engine starts. The headlights spread in a wide pool around us and then disappear into the night.

Mr. Lucas is looking at me with a twinkle in his spectacles. His lips are fat and red, but they cover a very small mouth. A prissy Kewpie-doll mouth. I don't like his mouth at all. I light a cigar and sit staring at the empty laundromat, its silent machines in gaping rows, waiting.

"Well," he says. "Oh, well. What about a drink?"

I take another puff while I think about it, then reach back into the rear seat and pull the fifth from under his daughter's new dress. He starts the engine, and the heater comes on again. I hadn't realized it was cold. I open the bottle and swallow and choke and swallow a little more. As soon as I can be sure that it won't make me puke it will have its chance to warm me.

"I didn't mean that," he says. "I meant with some dinner."

"I really don't want any dinner," I say, with the bottle propped up in my lap. "I think it's time I was going back."

He looks at me, surprised, wary. "Back to the school?"

"Yep." I take one last drink, since it doesn't seem to be fatal, put the cap on, and drag at the cigar. I'm not going to look at him anymore. He guns the car out onto the road and rams it viciously at the center line.

I can feel a snag creeping up one leg of my tights. His voice is doing a phony laugh above the rush of the car's noises.

"So that's what it is to be a tough broad!" He snorts. He mumbles for a while and then raises his voice again. "You crumble when you come within half a mile of confronting yourself!"

I stretch my legs as far into the heater blast as possible and lean back against the seat. The cigar glows bright in the dark of my lap. I open the window a crack and fling it out. A shower of sparks gone in an instant. I am warm. I am going home to my still bed. I can sleep.

I don't wake up until he shakes me. We are in the school parking lot. The headlights glare on the windows of my dormitory. It's raining. I yawn and reach for my purse.

"Sally." His hand on my arm. "I assume I can trust you? I've always assumed that."

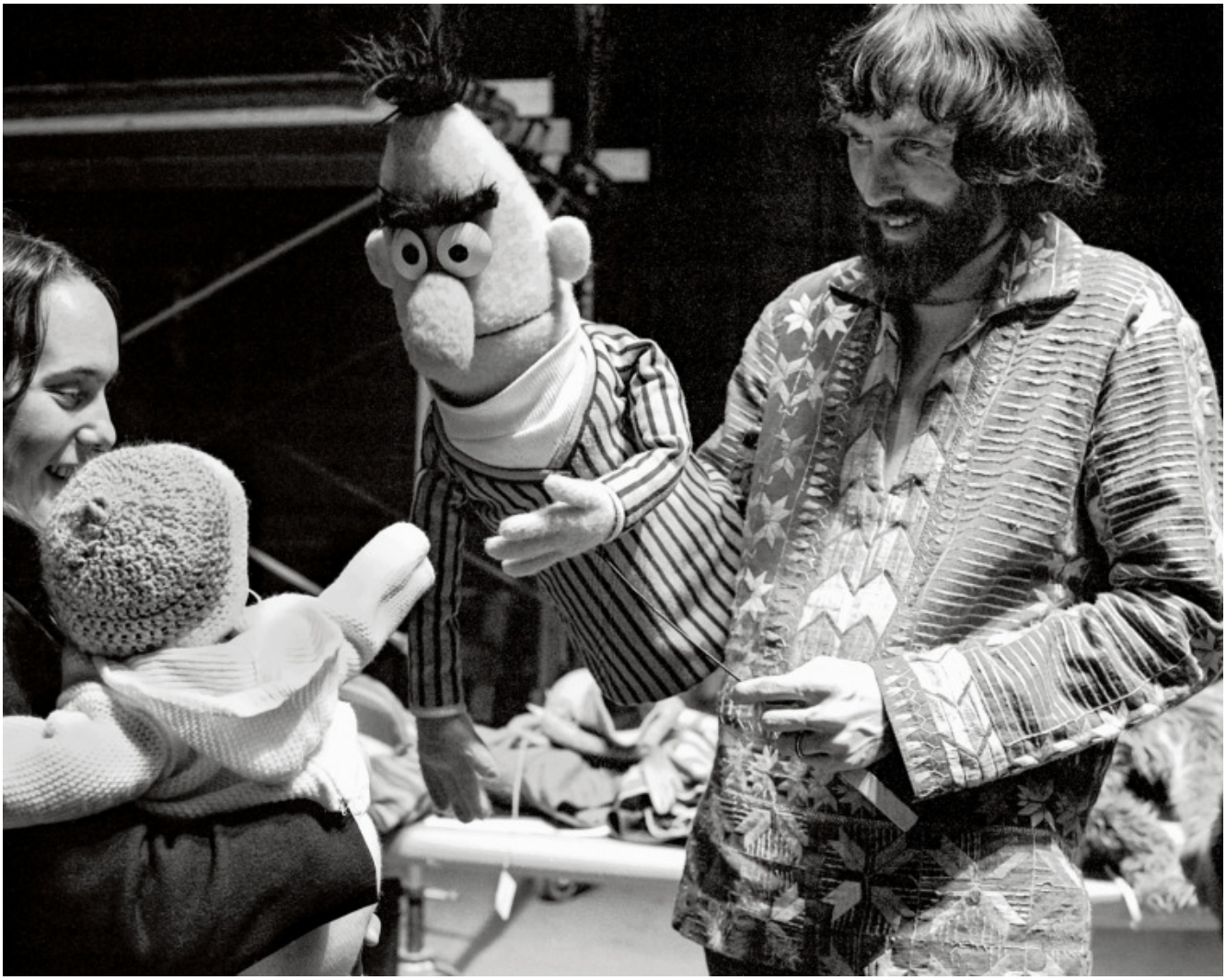
His temper is over. He's scared again. I can see my own window. My anger comes up again, secure and steady.

"Look," I say. "You are a two-bit shit and I am a two-bit shit. Let's not compound the stink by speaking to each other anymore."

I climb out and walk through the rain, into my building, and down the long green corridor. Warm in here. Clean. My room smells of old smoke. The door to Fern's room is closed. I won't have to face her until morning. I go to the window and look out on the parking lot, shimmering wet. "I'm never going to leave this room again," I tell myself. The window is a picture of the room. The table lamp and the bookshelf are vividly reversed in it. The doorknob glints in the black glass. But I am too close to the window, and my reflection is a silhouette surrounding the parking lot, with the whites of my eyes rolling in the black.

"Ah, poor Sally," I mutter at my bleary eyes. Even when there's no place left to be hurt, it seems there is something that can be diminished, whittled away. It will probably be weeks before I can even brag about this. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Naomi Huffman on the late author's archive.



DAVID ATTIE / GETTY

A CRITIC AT LARGE

WHEN ERNIE MET BERT

How we got to Sesame Street.

BY JILL LEPORE

In 1969, the Children's Television Workshop made a twenty-six-minute pitch reel to line up stations to air a radically new program that appeared to have, as yet, no title. Instead, a team of fleece- and fur- and muddle-headed puppets were seen brainstorming in a boardroom.

"What are those guys doing?" a dubious green frog asks, peering into the room with Ping-Pong eyes.

"Well, you see, we haven't settled on a title for the show yet, so the guys are working on it," a floppy-eared dog with a wide mouth says.

The guys come up with some whoppers. Like "The Two and Two Are Five Show."

"Two plus two don't make five, you meatball!"

"They don't? Then how about 'The Two and Two Ain't Five Show'?"

Then they try out a title that keeps getting longer and longer.

"Howzabout we call it 'The Little Kiddie Show'?"

"But we oughta say something about

Educational shows for kids responded to two conditions: the scarcity of preschools and the abundance of televisions.

the show telling it like it is! Maybe 'The Nitty Gritty Little Kiddie Show'?"

The frog, named Kermit, shakes his head at his dog friend, Rowlf. "Are you really gonna depend on that bunch to come up with a title?"

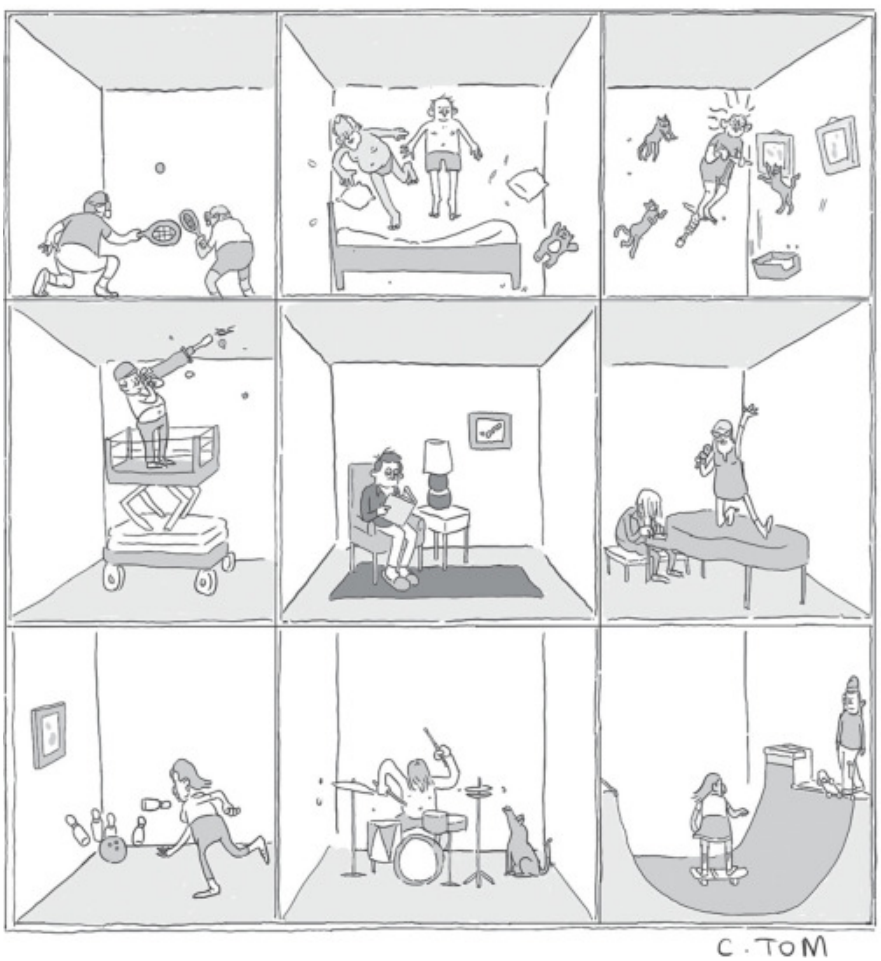
"You never can tell, Kermit," Rowlf says, with a hopefulness known only to dogs. "They just might think of the right one."

Half a century ago, before "Sesame Street," and long before the age of quarantine, kids under the age of six spent a crazy amount of time indoors, watching television, a bleary-eyed average of fifty-four hours a week. In 1965, the year the Johnson Administration founded Head Start, Lloyd Morrisett, a vice-president of the Carnegie Corporation with a Ph.D. in experimental psychology from Yale, got up one Sunday morning, at about six-thirty, a half hour before the networks began their day's programming, to find his three-year-old daughter, Sarah, lying on the living-room floor in her pink footie pajamas, watching the test pattern. She'd have watched anything, even "The Itty-Bitty, Farm and City, Witty-Ditty, Nitty-Gritty, Dog and Kitty, Pretty Little Kiddie Show."

Not much later, Morrisett fell into a dinner-party conversation with Joan Ganz Cooney, a public-affairs producer at New York's Channel 13. The first time Cooney had seen a television set was in 1952, when she watched Adlai Stevenson accept the Democratic nomination. She'd gone on to champion Democratic causes and had moved from Phoenix to New York to work at Channel 13, where her documentary projects included "A Chance at a Beginning," about a preschool program in Harlem. As David Kamp reports in "Sunny Days: The Children's Television Revolution That Changed America" (Simon & Schuster), both Cooney and Morrisett were caught up in Lyndon Johnson's vision of a Great Society, his War on Poverty, and the promise of the civil-rights movement, and they'd both been stirred by a speech delivered in 1961 by Newton Minow, President Kennedy's F.C.C. chairman, which called television a "vast wasteland." Minow, a former law partner of Stevenson's, had gone on to rescue Channel 13's public-broadcast mandate during a takeover bid. At that dinner party, Cooney and Morrisett got to talking about whether public-minded television might be able to educate young kids.

Educational television for preschoolers seemed to solve two problems at once: the scarcity of preschools and the abundance of televisions. At the time, half of the nation's school districts didn't have kindergartens. To address an achievement gap that had persisted long after Brown v. Board of Education, it would have been better to have universal kindergarten, and universal preschool, but, in the meantime, there was universal television. "More households have televisions than bathtubs, telephones, vacuum cleaners, toasters, or a regular daily newspaper," Cooney noted in a Carnegie-funded feasibility study, "The Potential Uses of Television in Preschool Education." With that report in hand, Morrisett arranged for a million-dollar grant that allowed Cooney to begin development of a show with no other title than "Early Childhood Television Program." In a fifty-five-page 1968 proposal, "Television for Preschool Children," Cooney reported the results of a national study of the increasingly sophisticated scholarship on child development: she'd travelled the country, interviewing scholars and visiting preschools to find out about what was called, at the time, the "sandbox-to-classroom revolution"—the pressing case for intellectual stimulation for three-, four-, and five-year-olds.

That proposal brought in the eight million dollars in foundation and government funding that made possible the founding of the nonprofit Children's Television Workshop and the production of the first season of the still unnamed "Early Childhood Television Program." "Nothing comparable to such a program now exists on television," Cooney observed. "Captain Kangaroo," broadcast on CBS beginning in 1955, had educational bits, but it was mainly goofy. (Bob Keeshan, who played the captain, had started out as a Sideshow Bob clown named Clarabell on "Howdy Doody" and then starred as Corny the Clown on ABC's "Time for Fun.") "Mister Rogers'



Neighborhood," a half-hour show produced by WQED, in black-and-white, had gone national in 1968, but reached mainly a middle-class audience. The new show would be broadcast nationally, every weekday, for an hour, in color; it would be aimed at all children, from all socioeconomic backgrounds; it would be explicitly educational, with eight specific learning objectives drawn from a list devised by experts; and its format would be that of a "magazine" made up of "one- to fifteen-minute segments in different styles"—animation, puppetry, games, stories. The "Early Childhood Television Program" would also be an experiment: its outcome would be measured.

Cooney put together a board of academic advisers, chaired by the developmental psychologist Gerald Lesser, and in 1968 she began a series of seminars loosely affiliated with the Harvard School of Education, where Lesser was a professor. To one of those seminars, she later recalled, "this bearded, prophetic figure in sandals walks in and sits way at the back, ram-rod straight, staring ahead with no expression on his face." She thought that he might be a member of the Weather Underground. She whispered to a colleague, "How do we know that man back there isn't going to throw a bomb up here or toss a hand grenade?"

"Not likely," he said. "That's Jim Henson."

Henson—along with Kermit—had got his start on "Sam and Friends," a puppet-centric show broadcast on an NBC affiliate in Washington, D.C., beginning in 1955. Other puppets on television performed on puppet stages. Among the many features of Henson's lavish genius was his understanding that the television screen itself was a perfect puppet stage. "*Sam and Friends* was to the Muppets what the Cavern Club was to the Beatles," Michael Davis wrote in his 2008 book, "Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street." The Muppets were witty and edgy, more Beat than square. Kermit appeared on the "Tonight Show" in 1957. But, four years later, "Sam and Friends" went off the air: Henson and his Muppets had outgrown it. Henson turned to making documentaries and films and commercials, as avant-garde as you could get with eyes made out of Ping-Pong balls. In 1968, "The Itty-Bitty, Farm and City, Witty-Ditty, Nitty-Gritty, Dog and Kitty, Pretty Little Kiddie Show" was not what he had in mind for his next career move.

Cooney hired a lot of her talent from "Captain Kangaroo," including Jon Stone, who would produce and direct the new show. It was Stone who had brought Henson to the seminars. "If we can't get Henson," Stone's team said, "then we just won't have puppets." In negotiations, Henson drove a hard bargain. He wanted to retain all rights to his Muppets and split any merchandising from the characters, fifty-fifty, with the Children's Television Workshop. Henson signed on, and brought on a team that included Frank Oz, who performed Bert, Cookie Monster, and Grover, and Caroll Spinney, who had played a lion on Boston's "Bozo's Circus," and now took on the roles of Oscar the Grouch and Big Bird, a character modelled on an easily flustered four-year-old who needs a lot of help. But Henson brought more than Muppets to "Sesame Street": he produced many of the show's "inserts," the short films that work like commercials. And it was Henson who put into the pitch reel the running gag about the show's having no title.

The bit was a sendup, but there had been a real battle about the title over at the Children's Television Workshop, where everyone had been required to come up with a list of twenty names. None of them worked. Stone suggested "123 Avenue B." The main stage, after all, was supposed to be a brownstone-lined city street, and, as Rowlf told Kermit in the pitch reel, "The idea is to teach little preschool kids some stuff that'll be useful to them in school, like numbers and letters, and like that." (Kermit cocked his green head: "And your idea is that the kids are gonna race in from baseball and turn on the educational-TV channel to be taught letters and numbers, hmm?") But "123 Avenue B" got struck down: too New York.

In the smoke-filled boardroom at the end of a long day, the network executives' clothes have grown rumpled and the table is heaped with crumpled pieces of paper.

Finally, one Muppet executive has an idea:

"Hey, these kids can't read or write, can they?" he asks, with the oily voice of a villain.

The other Muppets murmur their assent.

"Then howzabout we call the show 'Hey, Stupid!'"

This was Henson's swipe at the vapidity and condescension of earlier children's television shows, from "Ding Dong School" to "Howdy Doody" and "The Mickey Mouse Club," and at the kind of show that do-gooding foundations had imagined targeting, exclusively, to disadvantaged kids. ("What are they going to call it?" Cooney, wanted to know. " 'The Poor Children's Hour'?")

" 'Hey, Stupid!'?" Rowlf yowls, incredulous. "O.K., that does it! Out, you guys, out!"

The dog despairs—"Who's gonna find us a title now?"—until the frog croaks, "Hey, Rowlf, why don't you call your show 'Sesame Street'? . . . You know, like 'Open Sesame'? It kind of gives the idea of a street where neat stuff happens."

"Kermit, why, you're a genius!"

In fact, the idea hadn't gone over that well at the Children's Television Workshop, since, as one wisecracker pointed out, a good part of the show's audience—kids losing their baby teeth—would only be able to say, "Theth-a-me Threet." That, it turned out, was a price the Children's Television Workshop was prepared to pay.

"Sesame Street" débuted on PBS stations across the country on November 10, 1969, four months after Apollo 11 landed on the moon, and seven months before the U.S. invaded Cambodia. "Brought to you today by the letters 'W,' 'S,' and 'E,' and by the numbers 2 and 3," the show was actually underwritten by grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (established by the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967), the U.S. Department of Education, the Ford Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation.

Both NBC and CBS had turned down

the chance to broadcast the show. But, a week before its launch, NBC, in an act of surprising public-spiritedness, ran a half-hour preview, "This Way to Sesame Street," hosted by Ernie and Bert from their basement apartment. "It's gonna be on the air every day for a whole hour, and in some places it's going to be on twice a day, twice a day, Bert," Ernie says, holding up two fuzzy orange fingers.

The original "Sesame Street" has some of the campiness and Pop-art punchiness of the "Batman" TV series, broadcast on ABC from 1966 to 1968. It's got the pace and variety and kookiness of "Monty Python's Flying Circus," which made its début only weeks before "Sesame Street." And through it all runs a deep vein of earnestness, especially embodied in the human characters, assembled from a cast led by Matt Robinson. He had been hired as a producer and a coördinator of the show's live-action films but was recruited to play Gordon, a human character named for Gordon Parks. (Robinson's very young daughter, watching the first episode back home, cried and said, "His name's not Gordon, his name is Daddy.")

Within weeks, "Sesame Street" was a cultural phenomenon. A 1970 *New Yorker* cartoon: "Why isn't that child at home watching 'Sesame Street'?" a street cop asks the mother of a little girl feeding pigeons in the park. *TV Guide* declared in 1971 that "*Sesame Street* has enjoyed what may be the most astonishing success of any show in the whole history of American television." The *Times* critic Jack Gould predicted, "When the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey, completes its analysis in the months to come, 'Sesame Street' may prove to be far more than an unusual television program. On a large scale, the country's reward may be a social document of infinite value in education."

To an astonishing degree, that turned out to be true. A recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research, following up on the original E.T.S. assessment by looking at longer-term outcomes, described "Sesame Street" as "the first MOOC." But that description sells the show short; massive open online courses, like other kinds of "remote teaching," are mainly an educational catastrophe. Children all over the world have been shut out of their schools by the COVID-19 crisis, and, one fears, are learning very little on Google Hangouts and in Zoom classrooms. The story was different with "Sesame Street." For kids who were under six in 1969, watching "Sesame Street" had a measurable effect on what is known as "grade for age" status: they entered school at grade level, and, in elementary school, they stayed on grade level, an effect that, the study concluded, "was particularly pronounced for boys, black, non-Hispanic children, and those living in economically disadvantaged areas." And it cost only five dollars per kid per year.

One of the best things about early "Sesame Street" was how well it responded to its critics. When the show started, it had no Latino characters. After a series of protests from the Puerto Rican and Chicano communities, including a press release denouncing the Children's Television Workshop's "racist attitude," Cooney brought in a Latin-American advisory committee and, in its third season, added the characters of Maria (played by Sonia Manzano, who'd just graduated from Carnegie Mellon) and Luis (Emilio Delgado, an actor from L.A. and a longtime Chicano activist), who became the heart of the cast for decades. A grant from the Department of Education funded a Spanish-language version of the show, but "Sesame Street" also decided to just make the program bilingual. In 1972, after a letter-writing campaign by the National Organization for Women, following an Op-Ed in the *Times* that described "Sesame Street" as "a world virtually without female people," new people, and new Muppets, moved onto the street. And when initial testing revealed that the show's reach into the urban neighborhoods it most wanted to reach was limited, the cast was sent on a national tour to build interest in targeted cities. The outreach worked.

Early "Sesame Street" came in for criticism from the right, too. In May of 1970, just after the fatal police shootings at Jackson State College, Mississippi's State Commission for Educational Television voted to ban the show, objecting to its integrated cast. A character introduced by Robinson, the actor who played Gordon, also led to controversy. Robinson had come out of the Black Arts Movement and was among those who complained to Cooney that Sesame Street was "more Westchester than Watts." None of the Muppets read as black, so Robinson and Henson created a purple Muppet kid named Roosevelt Franklin. Franklin was such a prodigy that he ran his own elementary school. But he also talked in black English. This led to such a bitter fight between black anti-Roosevelt and pro-Roosevelt factions that Robinson left the show after the third season. But not before Roosevelt Franklin made an album of spoken poetry. "Take a listen to me talking," he says. "I like the way I talk. Yes, I do."

Despite the show's rocky start, those early episodes are still the best television ever made for young children. The magnificence of its achievement was summed up by this magazine's film critic Renata Adler, in 1972: "It is as though all the lessons of New Deal federal planning and all the sixties experience of the 'local people,' the techniques of the totalitarian slogan and the American commercial, the devices of film and the cult of the famous, the research of educators and the talent of artists had combined in one small television experiment to sell, by means of television, the rational, the humane, and the linear to little children." It doesn't get any better than that.

Emily Kingsley had worked odd jobs in television production until, in 1970, she was hired by "Sesame Street" as a writer. She went on to win twenty-three Emmys. In 1974, she gave birth to a boy, Jason, with Down syndrome. He started showing up as a guest when he was a toddler, and eventually appeared in fifty-five episodes. He helped Ernie spell words that end with "at." He counted in English; he counted in Spanish. Watching Jason reading the word "love" with Cookie Monster, letter by letter, is as sacred as some sacraments. "Sesame Street" broke a public silence on Down syndrome twelve years before ABC began broadcasting "Life Goes On," the first television show to feature a character (and actor) with Down syndrome. "I went for broke," Kingsley later recalled. "I said, 'If we can put on Jason, why can't we put on a whole lot of other kids with disabilities?'" Following Kingsley's initiative, "Sesame Street" characters and Muppets and guests have included deaf kids

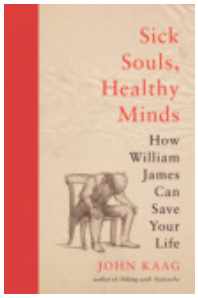
(the show also teaches sign language) and kids in wheelchairs. Tarah Schaeffer, who has osteogenesis imperfecta, joined the cast in 1993, when she was nine. A lot of viewers still remember when she sang "The Wheels on My Wheelchair" to the tune of "The Wheels on the Bus," on her way down the sidewalk to join a basketball game. In a more recent milestone, Julia, a yellow Muppet with autism, joined the show, in 2015. She and Big Bird got to be good friends. (Julia, though, later became the subject of contention. Last year, an autism-advocacy group that had helped develop the character cut ties with "Sesame Street.")

"Sesame Street" sparked a revolution in children's television, David Kamp argues, but those changes didn't last. "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" stopped making new episodes in 1975. "The Electric Company," another production of the Children's Television Workshop, shut down in 1977. Meanwhile, at "Sesame Street," Henson felt trapped. "I am living my own worst nightmare," he told Cooney, before leaving to launch "The Muppet Show," in 1976. For Kamp, "Sesame Street" peaked in 1983, after the death of Will Lee, the actor who played Mr. Hooper, the neighborhood grocer. Lee, a former member of a radical theatre troupe, had been called before the House Un-American Activities Committee in the nineteen-fifties and been blacklisted from television; "Sesame Street" had become his theatrical home. He was much admired by the rest of the cast, and the writers decided to reckon, on air, with grief. Big Bird, told that Mr. Hooper is dead, wants to know when he's coming back. "Big Bird, when people die they don't come back," a cast member says, softly. Big Bird tilts his head, yellow feathers fluttering, and whispers, unbelieving, "Ever?"

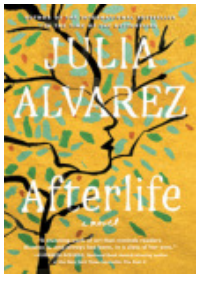
That episode was a high point. The Reagan years marked the beginning of the fall. The federal government all but stopped funding educational television in 1981, and deregulation meant that the F.C.C. accepted "The Flintstones" as fulfilling a station's "educational" requirement. Kids' TV in the nineteen-eighties involved mainly plastic toys: "My Little Pony 'n Friends," "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles." "Sesame Street" became more commercial. Stone complained, from retirement, that a new, gentrified

BRIEFLY NOTED

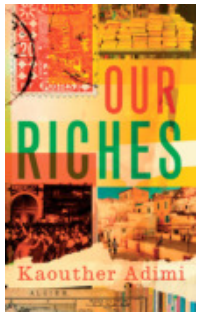
American Harvest, *by Marie Mutsuki Mockett (Graywolf).* Harvest season in the American wheat belt begins in Texas, in the late spring, when hundreds of seasonal workers are hired into crews and begin moving from farm to farm, to cut the year's grain. In this reflective travelogue, Mockett, who grew up in California, inherits a stake in her family's farm, in Nebraska, and sets out to understand the ways of the heartland by accompanying one of these harvesting teams on its months-long trek north. Mockett, writing with a gentle self-consciousness, offers a compassionate portrait of conservative evangelicals, along with lucid musings on agricultural science, Native American history, and the quiet majesty of the Great Plains.



Sick Souls, Healthy Minds, *by John Kaag (Princeton).* This earnest, accessible treatment of William James's thought is propelled by personal crises: the author, a professor of philosophy, leans on James's writing through the upheaval of his second divorce, his first forays into co-parenting, and his experiences teaching in the modern university system. Along the way, he delves into pragmatism, a philosophical tradition that James (the eldest brother of Henry, the novelist) pioneered, which holds that truths should be judged by their practical consequences. As Kaag traces James's intellectual path away from determinism and depression, he both clarifies thorny academic questions and offers dashes of self-help, showing how today's anxious souls might apply James's principles and learn how to "be not afraid of life."



Afterlife, *by Julia Alvarez (Algonquin).* The protagonist of this resonant novel, Antonia Vega, is an English professor who finds the comforts of language diminished after the sudden death of her husband. The needs of others soon bleed into her grief: an undocumented worker from a nearby farm asks Antonia, who is originally from the Dominican Republic, to help reunite him with the lover he left behind in Mexico, and the disappearance of one of Antonia's sisters further spurs her to muster her husband's generous spirit. The novel, set in 2019, poses questions about American immigration and mental-health policies, and it is a moving exploration of the ways we inadvertently fail the people we love. As Antonia observes, "It's a great effrontery to discover other people aren't you."



Our Riches, *by Kaouther Adimi, translated from the French by Chris Andrews (New Directions).* This stirring novel, which was shortlisted for the Prix Goncourt, is based on the life of Edmond Charlot, the publisher best known for discovering Albert Camus and for opening the famed bookstore Les Vraies Richesses in Algiers, in 1936. In his mission to distribute great literature, Charlot confronted overwhelming odds—he ran out of paper during the Second World War, and French colonial forces destroyed another of his stores during the Algerian war. His story is interspersed with that of a young man, sent to gut the storefront of Les Vraies Richesses eighty years later, who discovers the spirit of Charlot—and that of his bibliophilia—alive in the community.

set redesign in 1993 made it look "more like the South Street Seaport than 127th Street." "Barney and Friends" came out in 1992, and, not long afterward, a Barney-influenced Elmo came to Sesame Street, a place that had gotten, as Sonia Manzano put it, a whole lot "more cutie-pie." As Kamp observes, "Sesame Street" has become "essentially an expanded, extravagantly art-directed Elmo's World."

It's not that the show isn't still ambitious. It's that it's become hostage to its own ambition. "*Sesame Street* is the most extensively researched television program in history," according to "The Sesame Effect," a 2016 collection of essays by a team of researchers from the Sesame Workshop (the successor to the Children's Television Workshop). That's why "Sesame Street" tends to follow ed-school fads. A STEM curricular initiative became, right on schedule, a STEAM initiative (with an "A" for "arts"). Story lines, contorted to fit these fads, have grown more and more contrived. In one episode, the cast had to figure out how to use a pulley to lift Mr. Snuffleupagus into the air as part of the Dance of the Six Swans. Then there was the infamous cookie kerfuffle, in which, in response to the childhood-obesity epidemic, the show's producers decided to give Cookie Monster an epiphany: "Cookies are a sometimes food." Right-wing conspiracy theorists claimed that liberal, egghead vegetarians had renamed him Veggie Monster. Cookie Monster went on the "Today Show" and "The Colbert Report" to mock his critics. But there was actually something weirder behind the recasting of Cookie Monster, which had to do with an interest in addressing A.D.H.D. As reported in "The Sesame Effect," "Cookie Monster was selected to learn self-control and model self-regulation strategies to build executive function skills." Really? Cookie Monster?

Some of the show's more recent diversity-and-inclusion efforts have been controversial, and its definition of diversity and inclusion has its own limits (rural poverty and religion have little place on the American "Sesame Street," for instance). In 2011, the show introduced a Muppet named Lily, whose family is homeless; in 2013, Alex, whose father is in prison; in 2019, Karli, a child who has been placed in foster care because her mother suffers from opioid addiction. In the sixties, the creators of the original "Sesame Street" had a heated debate about whether to confront the grimmer realities of the lives of some of their viewers—drug use, gun violence, police brutality, domestic abuse—and decided against it. They chose, instead, to make the street look real, a little grimy, a little raggedy, but with problems like when Ernie eats cookies in bed, and Bert tells him he'll make a mess, so Ernie decides to eat his cookies in Bert's bed. This "Sesame Street" is not in the same neighborhood as that one.

"Sesame Street" is now seen in more than a hundred and seventy countries, mainly through co-productions, aided by the Sesame Workshop but run in-country by what the Workshop refers to as "indigenous" production teams of educators, artists, musicians, writers, and puppeteers. "Our producers are like old-fashioned missionaries," Cooney said in a 2006 documentary, "The World According to Sesame Street." "It's not religion they're spreading, but it's learning, and tolerance." If this has led to charges of cultural imperialism—many co-productions, including "Sisimpur," in Bangladesh, are funded, in part, by U.S.A.I.D.—those charges are generally belied by the actual productions. "Internationalism doesn't mean you must copy the rich country," the Bangladeshi puppeteer Mustafa Monwar has said, of a Dhaka-based production for which local set designers built a rural street set under a banyan tree by a tea shop. "Sisimpur" follows the " 'Sesame' model": educators meet with a creative team to develop the curriculum, whose effectiveness is subsequently assessed through testing. But the circumstances are fundamentally different from those in the United States in 1968: seventy per cent of Bangladesh's population is rural, and fewer than half can watch television. "Sisimpur" sends out televisions on rickshaws, for kids in villages to watch.

"This is corrupt to the point of perversion," Patrick Buchanan ranted on cable television in 2002, when "Takalani Sesame," a South African co-production, introduced Kami, a furry yellow Muppet who is H.I.V.-positive. Developed at the insistence of South African television for a preschool curriculum about the disease, Kami was hugely successful in educating kids, and their families, about H.I.V.-AIDS. "Kami, we are not scared to play with you, because we know that we cannot catch H.I.V. just by being your friend," another Muppet says to her. In 2016, Afghanistan's "Baghch-e-Simsim," now in its seventh season, introduced a purple Muppet named Zari, a six-year-old Muslim girl. (Americans have petitioned for a Muslim character to be added to the American show.) This winter, the Sesame Workshop, in tandem with the International Rescue Committee, launched one of the largest early-childhood interventions in the history of humanitarianism: "Ahlan Simsim," an Arabic-language show designed to help the thirty-one million children who are refugees.

Abroad, "Sesame Street" is still driven by the spirit of 1968. In the U.S., that spark has gone. The Muppets were sold to Disney, after which the Disney Channel launched a sickening animated series called "Muppet Babies," a show so merchandise-driven that wittle, itty-bitty, never-witty Baby Kermit might as well talk with a price tag hanging off his face. Since 2015, "Sesame Street" has been released first not on PBS but on HBO. A show designed as a public service, part of the War on Poverty, is now one you've got to pay for. In a staggering betrayal of the spirit of the show's founding philosophy, last year's fiftieth-anniversary special débuted on HBO. (Several months later, it was broadcast on PBS.) This month, HBO Max is launching "The Not-Too-Late Show with Elmo." A few years back, if you bought DVDs of any of the first five seasons of "Sesame Street" they came with a disclaimer: "These early 'Sesame Street' episodes are intended for grown-ups and may not suit the needs of today's preschool child." Or these anthology editions could just have been given a different title: "Hey, Stupid!"

"Stay home!" Oscar the Grouch says in a recent COVID-19 public-service announcement. "I don't want to see your smiling face!" It's not funny. It's not sweet. It isn't even delightfully grouchy. It's just shtick. Honestly, it's enough to send you to bed with a box of cookies. "I was just hungry, Bert. So I thought I'd have a few cookies before I go to sleep." Good night, Ernie. ♦

BE CORONAVIRUS SMART

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR FAMILY

1 TALK TO YOUR KIDS

Your Children May Be Feeling Confused and Anxious.

- **Answer questions** and **encourage them** to share their feelings.
- **Reassure them** that they are ok and you are there for them.

2 WASH HANDS FREQUENTLY

It's the Best Way to Stop the Spread.

- Thorough handwashing takes at least **20 seconds.**
- Do it when you come in from **outside,** before **eating** and after you **cough or sneeze.**

3 STAY AT HOME

Social and Physical Distancing Slows the Spread.

- This can be especially hard for kids. **Staying home protects your family and other people.**
- Keep playdates **virtual.**
- If you need to leave the house, stay a **minimum of 6 feet** from other people.

LEARN MORE AT **CORONAVIRUS.GOV**

FAMILY REMINDERS

Place notes like these to help your family stay safe.

DID YOU
Wash Your Hands?
Take 20 seconds and do it now.

HEY,
Clean Your Phone.
Because, um, you touch it all day long.

STAR IN
Your Own Video.
Visit with friends and loved ones via video instead of in person.

STAY
Six Feet Apart.
Any time you are outside of your house, no exceptions.

TALK
About It.
Sharing your feelings is a good thing.

THE ABYSS OF FREEDOM

Søren Kierkegaard's struggle with himself.

BY ADAM KIRSCH

Kierkegaard called his melancholy "the most faithful mistress I have known."

Imagine an educated, affluent European in his late twenties, seemingly one of fortune's favored, who suffers from crippling feelings of despair and guilt. For no apparent reason, he breaks up with the woman everyone thought he was going to marry—not because he loves someone else but out of a sudden conviction that he is incapable of marriage and can only make her miserable. He abandons the career for which he has been studying for ten years and holes up in his apartment, where a kind of graphomania compels him to stay up all night writing at a frantic pace. His activity is so relentless that, in a few short years, he has accumulated many volumes' worth of manuscripts.

If this happened today—say, in Denmark, the standard example of a rational modern society—the man would sooner or later end up in a psychiatrist's office, where he would probably be given a diagnosis of depression or bipolar disorder. He would start seeing a therapist and might be prescribed medication. The goal would be to get him back to normal, as the world defines "normal": able to take pleasure in life, to form relationships, to meet his obligations as a family member, friend, and citizen. The man would seek professional help, because, in the twenty-first century, he would recognize his propensities as *symptoms*—evidence of a psychological problem.

But when Søren Kierkegaard underwent these experiences in the Denmark of the eighteen-forties they had a different meaning. "At times, there is such a noise in my head that it is as though my cranium were being lifted up, it is exactly like when the hobgoblins lift a mountain up a little and then hold a ball and make merry inside," he wrote in his journal in February, 1838, when he was twenty-four. But Kierkegaard had learned from Romantic literature that wild emotion was a sign of genius, especially when it was painful. "Real depression, like the 'vapors,' is found only in the highest circles, in the former case understood in a spiritual sense," he wrote two months later. He considered his "melancholy" not a disease but a "close confidant . . . the most faithful mistress I have known."

Side by side with this fashionable style of feeling, Kierkegaard inherited from his ancestors a rigorously introspective Protestantism. His father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, had grown up poor in the countryside, moved to Copenhagen to become a merchant, and ended up as one of the city's richest men. Michael Pedersen raised his seven children, of whom Søren was the youngest, under strict religious discipline, instilling a sense of fear and guilt that never left them. "Oh, how frightful it is when for a moment I think of the dark background of my life, right from the earliest days!" Kierkegaard recalled. "The anxiety with which my father filled my soul, his own frightful melancholy."

For Kierkegaard, unhappiness became not a condition but a vocation. In a new biography, "Philosopher of the Heart" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), the British scholar Clare Carlisle shows that this calling consumed his life. After leaving school, at the age of seventeen, in 1830, he enrolled as a theology student at the University of Copenhagen, in order to prepare for a career in the church. But it took him ten years to complete his degree, and he never became a pastor or had any other kind of job. He never got married or had children. Other than a few visits to Berlin, then the capital of philosophy, and one trip to Sweden, Kierkegaard

ILLUSTRATION BY RUNE FISKER

never left Denmark. He took no interest in politics. In 1848, the liberal revolutions sweeping Europe reached Denmark, as protests forced the king to promise a new constitution and parliament; but Kierkegaard was indifferent. "So the king flees—and so there is a republic," he wrote in his journal that year. "Piffle."

What he did instead was write. Until his death, in 1855, at the age of forty-two, Kierkegaard lived off his inheritance and produced a stream of unclassifiable books—hybrids of philosophy, autobiography, fiction, and sermon. Advancing deeper and deeper into the experience of suffering, he emerged with a profoundly new way of thinking about human existence. The dark exigency of Kierkegaard's books, which he sometimes published two or even four at a time, is plain from their titles: "Fear and Trembling," "The Concept of Anxiety," "The Sickness Unto Death."

In that last book, which appeared in 1849, Kierkegaard offers an uncompromising diagnosis of the human condition. "There is not a single human being who does not despair at least a little, in whose innermost being there does not dwell an uneasiness, an unquiet, a discordance, an anxiety in the face of an unknown something," he writes. If you don't think you are in despair, you are lying to yourself, which is an even worse form of despair. Only by acknowledging our condition, he says, can we begin to understand that the true name of despair is sin, defiance of God. We are freed from it only when we accept that "a human self is under an obligation to obey God—in its every secret desire and thought."

This understanding of sin and redemption wasn't Kierkegaard's invention. Something like it was preached in Denmark's Lutheran churches every Sunday. What made his work explosive was his insistence that those very churches had become the chief obstacles to genuine Christian belief. Nineteenth-century Europeans took for granted that they were Christians simply because they were living in "Christendom," in countries where there were "just as many Christians as there are people," he wrote. But a Christian, for Kierkegaard, isn't something you are born; it is something you have to become through terrific inner effort. His "authorship," as he called it, was meant as an alarm bell to wake the modern world from its spiritual slumber.

Kierkegaard published his books at his own expense, and they initially had a tiny readership: the most popular, "Either/Or," didn't sell out its first edition of five hundred and twenty-five copies for three years. Nevertheless, he became a local celebrity, thanks mainly to his eccentricities and his penchant for public feuds. The editor of one Copenhagen paper, the *Corsair*, observed that, in "Kierkegaard's entire personal appearance and manner, there was something that verged on the comic." When the *Corsair* portrayed him in a series of mocking caricatures, in 1846, he became even more notorious. "Every kitchen boy feels justified in almost insulting me . . . young students titter and grin and are happy to see a prominent person trampled on," he complained.

When he died—probably of tuberculosis, though the diagnosis remains unclear—Kierkegaard had few if any readers outside Denmark. That didn't begin to change until he found an influential champion in the Danish literary critic Georg Brandes, who, in 1877, wrote the first book about Kierkegaard and brought him to the attention of a wider European audience. (Later, Brandes did the same for Nietzsche.) The first English translations of Kierkegaard appeared in the nineteen-thirties, and it wasn't until the sixties, more than a century after his death, that the translators Howard and Edna Hong began to produce a complete English edition of his works.

By that time, the Copenhagen eccentric had become one of the most important influences on twentieth-century theology and philosophy. Although the term "existentialism" wasn't coined until the nineteen-forties, in retrospect Kierkegaard appears as the first existentialist, thanks to his insistence that life's most important questions—How should I act? What must I believe?—can't be resolved by abstract reasoning. They present themselves as urgent problems for each individual, demanding commitment and action. "To be entirely present to oneself is the highest thing and the highest task for the personal life," he wrote.

The intimate connection between Kierkegaard's thought and his personal life has made him a compelling subject for biographers. Reading the "Critique of Pure Reason" won't tell you the first thing about Immanuel Kant, nor do you need to know anything about Kant's life to understand it. But Kierkegaard's work emerged, in complex yet unmistakable ways, from his own experiences. Other great thinkers specialize in technical fields such as logic or metaphysics, but Kierkegaard, as Carlisle's title has it, was a philosopher of the heart, "an expert on love and suffering, humor and anxiety, despair and courage."

Yet Kierkegaard also resists biography. The genre is inherently opposed to the way he thought about human existence. One of the best-known Kierkegaardian sayings, paraphrased from an entry in his journal, is that life can only be understood backward, but it has to be lived forward. In other words, at every moment, we are making a decision about how to live, one that can't be made for us by history, society, or even religion—any of the causes that might emerge when we try to analyze the course of our lives in retrospect. My future is no one's responsibility but my own. This is what Kierkegaard calls "the dizziness of freedom," which he compares to the vertigo we feel when looking into a "yawning abyss."

Biography, however, is necessarily written backward. It deals with life as a known quantity, obscuring the reality of contingency and choice. Carlisle, who has published three previous books about Kierkegaard, has tried to avoid this problem by writing what she calls "a Kierkegaardian biography of Kierkegaard," one that "does not consider Kierkegaard's life from a remote, knowing perspective, but joins him on his journey and confronts its uncertainties with him."

In practice, this means that Carlisle tells the story out of chronological order and adds passages of novel-like scene-setting. "Never before has he moved so quickly! And yet he is sitting quite still, not uncomfortably—resting, even—in a 'marvelous armchair,'" the first of the book's three sections begins. We are with Kierkegaard in 1843 as he

takes a train, that new invention, from Berlin to Copenhagen. Carlisle then fills in his story up to 1843, before jumping ahead, in the next section, to 1848 and again filling in the missing years—a cumbersome and sometimes confusing method.

The vignettes feel like packaging that the reader must unwrap to get to what is really excellent in the book: Carlisle's analysis of Kierkegaard's intellectual milieu. Copenhagen in the eighteen-forties was a small city of about a hundred and twenty thousand people, but the academic and clerical circles in which Kierkegaard moved were much smaller. His world, Carlisle writes, was "parochial, full of familiar faces": many of Denmark's leading clergymen, professors, and writers were his former schoolmates or family friends. And Carlisle shows that Kierkegaard's books partly emerged out of arguments with these figures—for instance, Bishop Mynster, the head of Denmark's state church, who became a symbol of everything Kierkegaard detested about official Christianity.

Kierkegaard didn't seem sure whether he wanted to stand out in this sedate, provincial community or to hide from it. He published under several Latin pseudonyms, which suggests a desire for concealment, but the names were so flamboyantly odd—Johannes de Silentio, Constantin Constantius, Vigilius Haufniensis (that is, "the watchman of Copenhagen")—that he may well have wanted to draw attention to his authorship.

His identity couldn't have been concealed for long anyway, since he wrote repeatedly about the one real drama in his life. In October, 1841, when he was twenty-eight, Kierkegaard broke off his year-long engagement to Regine Olsen, a nineteen-year-old from a highly respectable family. His sudden change of heart left her confused and miserable. "So after all, you have played a terrible game with me," Regine told him when they parted. The public rejection threatened to ruin her future marriage prospects. Carlisle quotes Kierkegaard's nephew's recollection of the affair: "It was an insulting break, which not only called forth curiosity and gossip but also absolutely required that every decent person take the side of the injured party. . . . Harsh judgments were unanimously voiced against him."

Imagine the reaction of local society, then, when, just over a year later, Kierkegaard published "Either/Or," a long book whose most attention-grabbing section, "The Seducer's Diary," is a first-person account of a man's callous pursuit of a young girl, whom he manipulates into submission and then discards. "Now it is over and I want never to see her again. Once a girl has given away everything, she is weak, she has lost everything," the seducer writes in his last entry. "I do not wish to be reminded of my relation to her; she has lost her fragrance."

All this made "Either/Or" a succès de scandale: one reader observed, "I think no book has caused such a stir with the reading public since Rousseau placed his 'Confessions' on the altar." But Kierkegaard's method was the opposite of the one chosen by Rousseau, who said that when he appeared before God on Judgment Day he would present a copy of his "Confessions" and declare, "Thus have I acted; these were my thoughts; such was I." For Kierkegaard, straightforward autobiography couldn't do justice to the truth of his experience, which was full of ambiguity, self-division, and doubt.

Instead, he concocted a series of nested narratives, defying the reader to say where Kierkegaard himself can be

found. The introduction to "Either/Or" recounts how the book's "editor," Victor Eremita, accidentally discovered a bundle of manuscripts in a secondhand desk. By the handwriting, he could tell that they were the work of two unknown authors; accordingly, the book is divided into two parts, attributed to "A" and "B." Eremita even says that he is placing the author's fee in an interest-bearing account for A or B to claim, should they ever appear.

The putative manuscripts encompass critical essays, the seduction diary, aphorisms, letters. Taken together, they illustrate the contrasting "life-views" of A and B, which Kierkegaard describes as the aesthetic versus the ethical. For A, life should be nothing but a series of interesting sensations. "How terrible is tedium—how terribly tedious," he muses. The seducer's diary shows how love is deformed when it is treated as just another trick for avoiding boredom. B is an older, married man who writes a series of letters to A chastising his frivolity. B argues that marriage represents not the death of romantic love but its fulfillment on a higher, more serious plane. "You talk so much of the erotic embrace, but what is it compared with the matrimonial!" he proclaims.

The title "Either/Or" implies that one must choose between these two ways of life, but that is just what Kierkegaard did not do. Whatever his readers may have imagined, he was not a cynical sensualist like A. He had courted Regine with the utmost propriety and was devastated by the end of their relationship. He never loved another woman, and when "Either/Or" was published he had two copies printed on vellum—"one for her, and one for me"—which he kept in a specially made cupboard.

But Kierkegaard could not become a contented husband like B. He left Regine, Carlisle argues, because marriage would mean sacrificing the freedom, the open-endedness, that he saw as the essence of an authentic life. "His life would be understood—it would be measured and judged—according to a well-established way of being in the world, shaped by a precise configuration of duties, customs, expectations," Carlisle writes. Kierkegaard preferred to remain dizzily suspended over the abyss of his own freedom, the only position that allowed him to keep writing.

In a typically dialectical fashion—"dialectical" is one of Kierkegaard's favorite words—he used this freedom to think about the nature of commitment. He believed that the most important commitment we can make is to God, and his work grew increasingly

concerned with religious faith. Eight months after "Either/Or" appeared, Kierkegaard published "Fear and Trembling," probably his best-known book today, which begins with the proposition that a human being becomes great "in proportion to the greatness of that which he loved." There is no greater object of love than God, Kierkegaard writes, and the Bible's most powerful example of what it means to love God is the story of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac, which he subjects to a powerful and dramatic analysis.

When God commanded Abraham to take Isaac—"your son, your only son, whom you love," the text emphasizes in Genesis 22—and slaughter him with a knife on top of Mt. Moriah, it was contrary to every natural feeling and ethical principle. It was even contrary to God's own earlier promise that Abraham would become, through Isaac, the father of a great nation. Yet Abraham obeyed—and his reward was to see Isaac saved at the last minute, when an angel appeared and told him he had passed God's test.

Because the story is so familiar, it is easy to glide past its transgressive implications. Imagine, Kierkegaard writes, that a Danish pastor in the nineteenth century made the sacrifice of Isaac the subject of a Sunday sermon, and one of his congregants was inspired to go home and murder his own son for the sake of God. If the pastor found out, he would surely go to the man's house and exhort him not to do it—and this exhortation would be far more earnest and passionate than the original sermon, showing where his real conviction lay. Abraham had a kind of faith that even the most religious people lack: he believed that God had the power to suspend morality. More, he trusted that somehow God would make it possible for him to kill Isaac and still keep him, which is logically impossible. True faith, Kierkegaard insists, believes "by virtue of the absurd"—which is why almost no one has it.

The only reason we are able to praise Abraham for doing something that would horrify us in actuality is that we make excuses: Abraham was a great man, he lived a long time ago, things were somehow different for him than they would be for us. But Kierkegaard insists that there is no difference between the past and the present, between Abraham and you. The responsibility of choice—to believe or not to believe, to act or not to act—is always individual. "It is repugnant to me to do as so often is done, namely, to speak inhumanly about a great deed, as though some thousands of years were an immense distance," he writes in "Fear and Trembling." "I would rather speak humanly about it, as though it had occurred yesterday."

"Once again, the correct answer is 'I don't know.'"

• •

During the next six years, Kierkegaard pursued the dialectic of belief through thousands of pages. His collected work in Danish fills twenty-eight volumes, almost all of it produced between 1843, the year of "Either/Or" and "Fear and Trembling," and 1849, when "The Sickness Unto Death" appeared. Then he mostly stopped writing. The final part of "Philosopher of the Heart," covering his last six years, reads almost like a coda. By the age of forty, Carlisle writes, Kierkegaard had become "a frail figure: more stooped and slender than ever, his hair thin, his face tired."

He didn't seem to miss his life of feverish productivity. In one of his last major books, the posthumously published "The Point of View for My Work as an Author," Kierkegaard summarized the "movement" of his authorship as a journey away from cleverness and complexity. "Christianly, one does not proceed from the simple in order then to become interesting, witty, profound, a poet, a philosopher," he writes. "No, it is just the opposite; *here* one begins and then becomes more and more simple." The final simplicity is silence, and in his last years Kierkegaard truly earned the pseudonym under which he had published "Fear and Trembling," Johannes de Silentio—John of the Silence.

When he became seriously ill, in 1855, he seemed content to die, even though he was only forty-two. The money he had inherited from his father was about to run out—he had spent much of it on the publication of his books—and he might well have felt that the timing was providential. Kierkegaard's niece visited him in the hospital shortly before he died, and observed that "a feeling of victory was mixed in with the pain and the sadness." One of the last things he wrote was a letter to his brother about the disposition of his estate: everything he owned was to go to Regine, "exactly as if I had been married to her." ♦

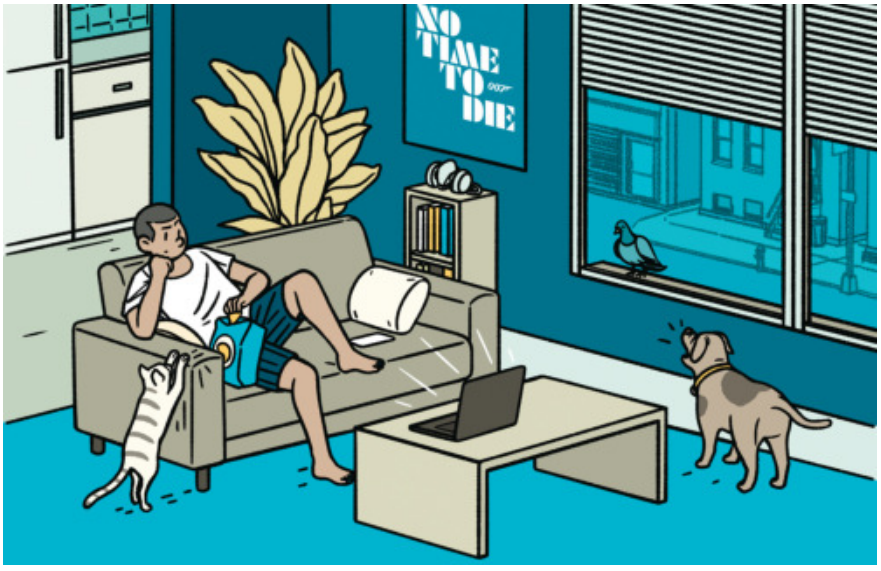
THE CURRENT CINEMA

PERCHANCE TO *STREAM*

Online releases test the waters of a changed industry.

BY ANTHONY LANE

In the olden days, which, according to historians, ended a few months ago, people used to do the strangest things. They exchanged what were known as "hugs," presumably a unit of currency, or else "handshakes," which, judging by the name, may well have been a strain of palsy. "Going out for a drink" entailed gathering at some form of communal well, an obvious source of infection. There was also something called "making out." Ethnological research has identified this as ritualistic playacting, often terminating in humiliation. No activity from that far-off period, however, seems as inexplicable as this: humans went to the movies.



With movie theatres closed, will people pay top dollar for home viewing?

Details are scarce, and memories are hazy, including my own. But I seem to recall that we sat in a blacked-out room, in rows, and frequently in discomfort. We did so of our own volition, and paid for the privilege, even though screenings began at an appointed hour and—imagine this!—the content had been determined, in advance, on our behalf. Interactivity stood at zero. We could neither quicken nor freeze the action, and those wishing to follow a narrative in its entirety were forced to develop ferocious bladder control. Drinks and foodstuffs were allowed, but only if purchased on the premises and guaranteed to promote active dental decay. Why we tolerated these outrageous restrictions on our personal liberty, and why some of us persisted in venturing out to the cinema rather than staying at home to view a product of our choosing, while snacking on crap from our own fridge, is a puzzle that may never be solved. Perhaps our minds were unsound.

Now, of course, that option no longer exists. Movie theatres are closed across America, especially in the larger and denser cities. Even if you stumble upon a venue that *has* remained open, stop and think. In all honesty, you should no more watch a new release in the company of coughing strangers than you should visit your grandma and give her a birthday hug. And, anyway, what is there to watch?

One of the first signs that COVID-19 would play havoc with our moviegoing habits came with the news that 007 was running scared. The world première of the new James Bond film, bearing the deeply unfortunate title "No Time to Die," was meant to take place at the Royal Albert Hall, in London, on March 31st. Oh, to be in England, now that Bond was there! The plan was for the movie to open in the United States on April 10th, and the publicity machine had been pumping away for months. The trailers were out; the talk shows were booked; the Aston Martin was having a final wax. Then the blow fell. "No Time to Die" will now be released in November—a relief for Daniel Craig, who can throw his tux back in the wardrobe, put on a sweater, and get out the Scrabble board, but a wrenching loss for the rest of us. The chance to revel gaily in the latest Bond production, and then to lament that it wasn't as good as the last one, or the one before that, or the one with the Japanese volcano, comes along every four or five years, and is connected to the great circle of life. Without 007, how shall we endure the spring?

As with Bond, so with "Mulan." Disney and other studios have delayed the explosion of their major films. Marvel has shunted "Black Widow" to November 6th, and another of its offerings, "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," all the way to May, 2021. I'm not sure I can wait that long. "A Quiet Place Part II" has tiptoed softly to September, and other follow-ups have taken to their heels; somehow, we must get through this year without fresh installments of "Peter Rabbit" and "Fast & Furious." Maybe those two should cut their losses and merge into one mega-sequel, with Vin Diesel as Mr. McGregor.

Procrastination, though, is not the only game in town. There has also been brinkmanship, with the studios eying each other and wondering: Who will be the first to blink? Who will think, Screw it—let's forget about a motion-picture event, scrap the launch, and switch to a streamed release? Prophets of a gloomy bent believe that history is curving in this direction anyway: that cinemas are fated to fall into disuse, with tumbleweed rolling in the aisles, and that the future of film belongs online, where the new Spielberg, say, or

ILLUSTRATION BY JANNE IIVONEN

the new Bong Joon-ho, will have to hold its own against outtakes from "Friends" and videos of cats wearing hats. If this argument is correct, the coronavirus has merely hastened the inevitable, and we should honor, not pity, the movie that has paid the ultimate price, forgoing the majesty of the large screen for the sake of a digital download. Such a sacrifice will never be forgotten. That movie is "Trolls World Tour."

The first "Trolls" movie came out in 2016. It made three hundred and forty-seven million dollars. If, owing to some tragic oversight, you failed to see it, you should know that it was a candy-colored, song-stuffed, sparkle-strewn, computer-animated film that hymned the virtues of dancing, hugging, and finding your happy place. For those of us who assumed that a troll was some gnarly bastard from Norse legend, or a costive hermit harassing celebrities on his laptop, these rebooted Trolls, inexorably genial, came as a surprise. They made the Cabbage Patch Kids look like the Trojan Women.

The new film repeats the prescription, with a spoonful of scares to help the sugar go down. The dainty-hearted Queen Poppy (voiced by Anna Kendrick) learns that Barb (Rachel Bloom), who rules the Rock Trolls, wants to eradicate all other kinds of music, not least the meaningless pop that lends both value and depth to Poppy's existence. With the aid of her pal Branch (Justin Timberlake), Poppy embarks on a mission to save Trollkind, and to slather us with a message of creamy togetherness. All yours to rent, for just under twenty dollars.

But *will* you rent it? The rationale is clear enough. With families trapped inside by COVID-19, and children out of school and starting to climb the walls, a hyperactive new movie ought to be just the ticket. Also, twenty bucks is less than you'd pay at the cinema for yourself, your kids, and your silo-size Cokes. Yet the sum feels extortionate when you're shelling out at home, perhaps because it carries a sweaty whiff of boxing bouts on pay-per-view. You half expect Tyson Fury, and you get Queen Poppy. In short, "Trolls World Tour" is a test case. To date, having earned almost a hundred million dollars online, this proud herald of the streaming age is well on the way to finding its happy place.

Thus far, of all the films that were made with meaty budgets and destined for a wide release, "Trolls World Tour" alone has traded the multiplex for a slot on your TV, or your annoyingly cracked phone. Smaller independent movies, though, are already making the jump, as if more confident of recouping their costs. Take "True History of the Kelly Gang," adapted from Peter Carey's novel of the same title and directed by Justin Kurzel. Set and shot in Australia, it stars George MacKay (who played the lone hero in "1917") as Ned Kelly and features Russell Crowe, impenetrably bearded, in a minor role. The total budget, I reckon, might just about have covered the special effects in "Black Widow," not counting Scarlett Johansson's boots.

The real-life Kelly was an outlaw, a killer, and a rebel in the high style; a fifty-six-page letter that he wrote in 1879, the year before his death, seeking to justify his deeds, is a headlong rush of grandiloquence. His place in Australia's national mythology seems at once secure and riven by controversy, and Kurzel is by no means the first director to tackle the subject. A full-length feature film, "The Story of the Kelly Gang," came out in 1906, believe it or not, little more than a quarter of a century after Kelly had been hanged.

Kurzel's approach, as he showed in "Macbeth" (2015), leans toward the savage and the surreal. The young Ned, born of poor Irish immigrants, sees his mother providing sexual services to a local constable; a hatred of authority glows in the lad's eyes, and you sense that the age-old Anglo-Irish feud is burning anew in another hemisphere. The adult Kelly is hunted down by the law, and defiantly dons a suit of armor for the climactic standoff. That is no invention; the suit, fashioned from parts of a plow, can still be seen, pitted by gunshots, in the State Library of Victoria. (Ned advanced, as one witness reported, "like the ghost of Hamlet's father.") In a famous series of paintings, made in 1946-47, the Australian artist Sidney Nolan returned again and again to the flat black square of Kelly's helmeted head; Kurzel, by contrast, takes us *inside* the helmet, so that we glimpse a line of armed police through the visor's slot.

Cheerless, dark, and deadly, "True History of the Kelly Gang" has nonetheless left me with fond feelings, for it was the last thing that I saw at the cinema, in preview, before the lockdown began. The film was supposed to open theatrically at the end of April, instead of which it was made available for download. Watching it again, in domestic surroundings, I was sorry, though hardly shocked, to find its wildness tamed. That is what home viewing does to feature films: grandeur is squeezed, intensity skirts risibility, the manic becomes the eccentric, and horror, even if you turn off the living-room lamps, melts into cheesiness. Hit the Pause button, mid-thriller, and the thrills will die on you by the time you get back from the kitchen.

Still, this is where we are. Acclimatizing to such conditions is part of the new modus vivendi, and, if our health depends on watching movies from the safety of our own couch, possibly with a dog in the way, so be it. My suspicion is that lighter and goofier films will prosper in the streaming market, not simply because they offer relief—our craving for which, right now, is off the scale—but also because of the relative ease with which comedy can weather the change of format.

Consider, for example, Clark Duke's "Arkansas," starring Liam Hemsworth and John Malkovich, and due for digital release on May 5th. What greets you at the outset of the Ned Kelly film—an astounding aerial image of a rider in a red dress, galloping through a wasteland of leafless trees—is instantly hobbled when viewed on your MacBook Pro, whereas the sight of Malkovich, clad in the uniform of a park ranger, is funny however (and wherever) you look at it. I mean, how jungly and strange would America's parks be if Malkovich were in charge? In "Arkansas," he plays Bright, a lazy link in a drug network run by a guy named Frog (Vince Vaughn), whose rise to power is traced in flashback. The film is physically nastier than it needs to be, but the characters are gratifyingly dim, and the yarn, split into chapters, is spun at a gentle pace. So gentle, indeed, that the first chapter is entitled "Boredom is beautiful." I wouldn't go *that* far. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

THE THEATRE

LIFE'S WORK

The drama of Lorraine Hansberry.

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM

Hansberry struggled to synthesize her interest in politics, humanism, and beauty.

Since early April, when the great literary critic and English professor Cheryl A. Wall died, I have been thinking about the last book she published, "On Freedom and the Will to Adorn," about the African-American essay tradition. Wall was one of the foremost scholars and interpreters of the work of Zora Neale Hurston, and, in "On Freedom," Wall latches on to Hurston's assertion that the "will to adorn"—a tendency toward linguistic flourish, even under duress—is an important aspect of "Negro expression." Wall believed that the black essay has often fulfilled two barely extricable purposes: to argue for political, economic, social, racial, and sexual liberation, and to satisfy a writer's urge for self-expression through aesthetics.

Wall's insight goes beyond the essay; it's more like an unveiling of the impulses—sometimes harmonious, sometimes dissonant—that come together to make art of any kind that is anchored in place and time but can also move past those parameters. There may be no better example of this capacity in the modern American theatre than the life and art of the playwright Lorraine Hansberry, who died in 1965, at the age of thirty-four, but left behind enough genius for lovers of literature to follow like a trail of generous crumbs. (May 19th will mark the ninetieth anniversary of Hansberry's birth.)

Even before her sparkling career as a playwright began, Hansberry walked a political-artistic tightrope, making personal and creative adjustments in order to achieve the kind of balance that Wall describes. In her early twenties, having just arrived in New York from the Midwest, she published poems in radical journals; worked as a journalist for *Freedom*, a black leftist newspaper published by the actor and singer Paul Robeson; and studied with W. E. B. Du Bois, at the Jefferson School of Social Science. She was beginning to hone her lifelong leftward politics into a roving, endlessly empathetic global vision.

Around that time—according to "Looking for Lorraine: The Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry," Imani Perry's intimate, ruminative book, from 2018, more documentary portrait than strict biography—Hansberry sent a letter to her boyfriend, Robert Nemiroff, whom she would later marry. The letter ended with a tellingly determined manifesto:

> 1. I am a writer. I am going to write.
> 2. I am going to become a writer.
> 3. Any real contribution I can make to the movement can only be the result of a disciplined life. I am going to institute discipline in my life.
> 4. I can paint. I am going to paint.
> The END

Hansberry was not only personally ambitious but also hoped to merge her aesthetic and political concerns, which had grown together like a tree with twin trunks—its highest branches intermingled, its sustenance coursing through a mutual system of roots.

Perry's book is an elegant, softly subjective rereading of the facts of Hansberry's life. If Hansberry's own story is a kind of drama, Perry is her most perceptive, unabashedly biased critic, helping to reiterate and build on her themes, and to make her performance live again. "Looking for Lorraine" tunnels deep into Hansberry's psyche, showing how the dissonance of her youth yielded a poised artist, cut down too early by illness. Hansberry had a relatively bourgeois, liberal, middle-class upbringing, in Chicago, but it was ringed by violence. When her father, a real-estate entrepreneur, bought a house in a white neighborhood, the family was greeted with a cement block thrown through their front window; it just missed Lorraine's head, and lodged itself into a wall.

If Perry has one persistent obsession, it is how, after this harrowing moment,

DAVID ATTIE / GETTY

Hansberry struggled to synthesize her attraction to politics, her deeply felt humanism, and her native interest in beauty: how she learned to move from helpless frustration to a contemplation of the earth's magnificence in one mental stroke. "There were her politics, centered on the poor, the marginal, the oppressed and outsiders," Perry writes, "and there was her grasping at the interior life."

In 1959, Hansberry had an astounding success, with "A Raisin in the Sun," becoming the first black woman to have a play début on Broadway. The plot centers on a Chicago family's complications in moving to an all-white neighborhood. It satisfied every requirement of a "well made" domestic drama, setting its characters' generational, religious, and political divisions so artfully against one another that the eventual climax—Walter Younger's loss of his family inheritance—feels like a glimpse beyond setting and character and into the country's future of commingled hopes and desires.

After "Raisin"'s run, Hansberry wrote a post-apocalyptic fantasy called "What Use Are Flowers?" She conceived it as a television special, but decided to make it a play instead. Parts of it have been adapted for radio and staged readings, and some of its text was used in "To Be Young, Gifted and Black," the posthumous play that was edited by Nemiroff. To read "Flowers" now—alongside other post-"Raisin" works, such as "Les Blancs" and "The Drinking Gourd," all of which, along with "Flowers," are collected in a book called "Les Blancs: The Collected Last Plays of Lorraine Hansberry," from 1972—is to be reminded that, for Hansberry, "Raisin" was a beginning, not an end. The theatre, with its urge to make the interior visible, and to force contradictions through the refiner's fire of confrontation, was a perfect vehicle for her to develop both her politics and her art.

"Flowers" begins in a bleak landscape, empty except for a group of scantily clothed kids. They are prelingual, and look hungry. It's unclear what has happened to civilization, but the clear reference—given the time, and Hansberry's global political concerns—is to the bomb. Hansberry had watched Du Bois, her mentor and a family friend, get arrested and indicted after starting a petition against nuclear weapons. He was ostracized in polite circles, both black and white, and was labelled a Soviet agent.

Hansberry's admiration for Du Bois was total. In a journal entry, she called him "freedom's passion, refined and organized." That formulation sounds like an eerie anticipation of Wall's: Du Bois's 1903 book, "The Souls of Black Folk," in which he brought together social science, reportage, music criticism, and even fiction, is a cornerstone of the black essay tradition. He had used his peerless education, personal fastidiousness, and artistic flair as a conduit for his passions, not an excuse to dampen them in the name of respectability. He had paved a road that Hansberry hoped to travel.

In "Flowers," the kids kill an animal and fight over the body. Nobody coöperates; it's a microcosm of Hobbes's "war of all against all." A struggle ensues, and, Hansberry notes in her stage directions, "those who are strongest triumph." Apocalypse has exposed human ruthlessness and set it loose as the highest law.

Into this brutal scene enters a man who describes himself as a hermit. He walked into the woods twenty years ago and is now returning to a nightmare. Once he realizes what has happened, he makes the children his project. He was an English teacher in the old world. He says of the people he left behind, all of whom, except for these children, are now presumably dead, "What a strange tribe they were! Lunatics and heroes all!" The children, he learns, were brought here by a man and a woman who hoped, perhaps, that they would survive and live to propagate the species. (Awkwardly, there's only one girl among them.) The hermit teaches the children to speak, introducing them to simple concepts, one by one.

But abstractions are difficult. The hermit strains, especially, to explain what it means to "use" something. Soon, the organs of civilization start to return. One kid learns to speak passably well. Another "invents" the wheel. Violence still breaks out, but beneath it hope peeks through. There's a question that the hermit never successfully answers, though—one that seems as relevant today, as we walk through our own real-life apocalypse, as in this barren imagined landscape. One child asks what "use" flowers have—why beauty? The hermit's struggle to answer feels like the whole agony of creation. The stakes seem absurdly high, but it's a plausible diagnosis of the human problem, resolvable only by keeping one eye on surfaces and the other on the spirit: imagine or die. ♦

THE NEW YORKER IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2020 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

VOLUME XCVI, NO. 12, May 11, 2020. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for four combined issues: February 17 & 24, June 8 & 15, July 6 & 13, and August 3 & 10) by Condé Nast, a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Eric Gillin, chief business officer; Piper Goodspeed, head of brand revenue strategy; James Guilfoyle, executive director of finance and business operations; Fabio B. Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast Global: Roger Lynch, chief executive officer; Wolfgang Blau, chief operating officer and president, international; Pamela Drucker Mann, global chief revenue officer and president, U.S. revenue; Anna Wintour, U.S. artistic director and global content advisor; Mike Goss, chief financial officer; Samantha Morgan, chief of staff. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail subscriptions@newyorker.com. Give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable, you are dissatisfied with your subscription, you may receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For advertising inquiries, e-mail adinquiries@condenast.com. For submission guidelines, visit www.newyorker.com. For cover reprints, call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail covers@cartoonbank.com. For permissions and reprint requests, call (212) 630-5656, or e-mail image_licensing@condenast.com.
No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit www.condenast.com. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, advise us at P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, or call (800) 825-2510.

THE NEW YORKER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ART WORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, ART WORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE NEW YORKER IN WRITING.

PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE

CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by P. C. Vey, must be received by Sunday, May 10th. The finalists in the April 27th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 25th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

“ ”

THE FINALISTS

“Next week, I'll move Heaven for you.”
Stephanie Miller, San Rafael, Calif.

“It's mostly water weight.”
Vincent Coca, Staten Island, N.Y.

“I'm not bringing work home anymore.”
John Golden, Grand Haven, Mich.

THE WINNING CAPTION

“Decaf. They can't be far away.”
Bill Clough, Modesto, Calif.

SMOOTHING OUT WRINKLES? EASY. GIVE IT A WEEK.

THE FASTEST DERM-PROVEN RETINOL FORMULA.

#1 DERMATOLOGIST RECOMMENDED BRAND

Neutrogena®

©J&JCI 2020

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF *BLUE VALENTINE* AND *THE PLACE BEYOND THE PINES*
MARK RUFFALO
MELISSA LEO
ROSIE O'DONNELL
ARCHIE PANJABI
JULIETTE WITH LEWIS
KATHRYN AND HAHN
YOU DON'T JUST GIVE UP ON THE PEOPLE YOU LOVE.
I KNOW THIS MUCH IS TRUE
BASED ON THE BEST-SELLING NOVEL
MAY 10 AT 9PM HBO
AND STREAMING SOON ON HBOmax